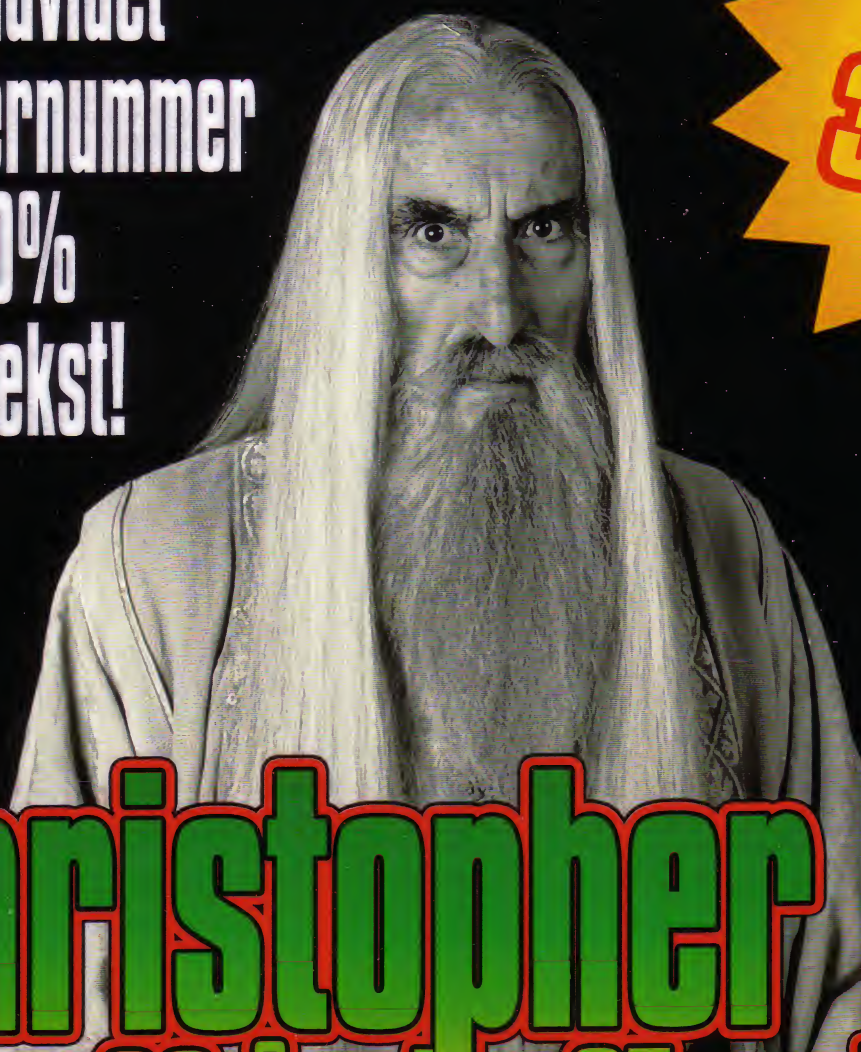


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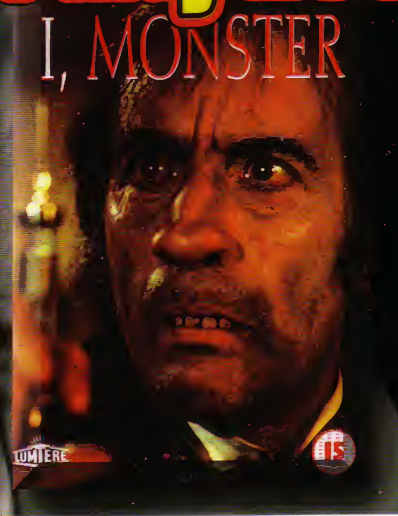
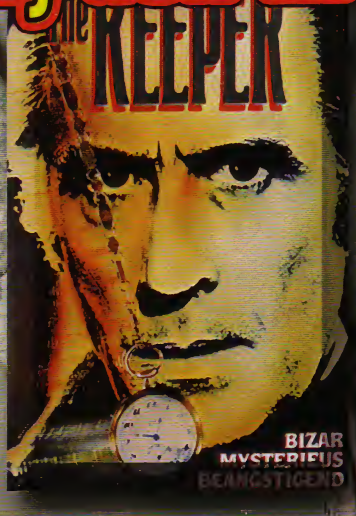
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Af Jack J.

KILIC ASLAN (LION MAN)

By Ayman Kole

EN FIMFANTAST I ET LAND AF MUSKELMÆND - RICCARDO FREDAS PEPLUMFILM

Af Thure Munkholm

Alle illustrationer er udelukkende benyttet i oplysningsmæssig henseende.



LEDER

I januar havde jeg så travlt med at få #2 af bladet færdigt, for at kunne fremlægge det på filmmessen i Nørrebrohallen, at hastværket beklageligvis gik ud over layout og kontinuitet. Jeg plejer for sjov skyld at sige, at **Obskuriøst** er det eneste fanzine herhjemme, hvor redaktøren overholder sine egne deadlines, men man kan altså også blive for præstationsfikseret. Denne gang var det et problem overhovedet at komme i gang. Ikke at der manglede velvillige tilbud om bidrag fra skribenter, men redaktøren måtte vinter og forår igennem fægte sig igennem den ene personlige krise efter den anden, fra sygdom i allernærmeste familie til en lejlighed som i bedste Dario Argento stil blev invaderet af møl. Jeg kunne ikke mobilisere det fornødne overskud til selv at få skrevet noget, gad ikke besvare e-mails fra mine skribenter og var vist generelt temmelig usammenhængende og opgivende. Bladet rumlede stadig i baghovedet, jeg havde masser af ideer, den ene mere vidtløftig end den anden, men gøre noget ved dem - nej. Jeg tror det var Palle som fik sparket mig på ret kurs igen. Vi mødtes til et større fællesarrangement og over et glas rødvin spurgte han overraskende, *nå, nu kommer der vel snart et nyt Obskuriøst?* Øh... Jeg forsøgte at give ham den samme klagesang min øvrige omgangskreds havde fået og stod pludselig og kunne høre, hvor sølle det lød. Kort tid efter gik jeg så i gang fra en ende af med at tømme skrivebordsskuffen for at se, hvad der egentlig lå af materiale. Jeg checkede gammel korrespondance, ringede rundt for at høre hvem der stadig var interesserede i at skrive for bladet og skrev en revideret synopsis for et #3. Mine problemer var selvfølgelig ikke forsvundet som dug for solen, men nu havde jeg genvundet modet - ja, det lyder så fortærsket, men hvad kan man ellers sige? - og lysten til arbejde videre på projektet. Og for et privat udgivet blad om film som ingen anstændige mennesker nogensinde vil komme i berøring med, stykket sammen i fritiden og trykt i et lattervækkende mikroskopisk oplag er lysten til at rent faktisk at producere skidtet afgørende. Man bør ikke lave sådan noget af sur pligt overfor en hypotetisk læserskare eller - guderne forbyde det - for profittens skyld.

Obskuriøst #3 er et godt blad, et som jeg er glad for at kunne præsentere, men det har ændret sig betragteligt fra mine oprindelige planer. Således blev det påtænkte Christopher Lee-tema reduceret til en enkelt artikel og forskellige andre indslag er udskudt til et kommende nummer - det gælder bl.a. blad og musik anmeldelser. Tak til alle som var involveret i tilblivelsesfasen. Næste gang går det forhåbentlig mere smertefrit... men det tænker man jo *altid* bagefter.

Henrik Larsen, København, 19.maj 2002

LÆSERBREV

Linus Bengtsson i Sverige sprudler af begejstring over bladet, især artiklerne om tyrkiske film. Efter at have modtaget nr.1 skrev han til redaktionen: *Obskuriøst* var helt suveræn! Jag lusläste den över en god kopp tee och blev glatt överraskad av de fina (färg)bilderna på filmer som **Superargo** och **Argoman**. Den tillhörande texten var mycket underhållande och välskriven. Det absolut bästa med din tidning var ändå den uttömmande artikeln om Cetin Inancs **Dunyayi Kurtaran Adam**. Fantastiskt bra! Jag ser verkligen fram emot nästa nummer. Lite lustigt att jag samma dag fick ett par tokiga ninjafilmer, regisserade av Cetin Inanc, i brevlådan. Så jag hade en riktigt trevlig Fredagskväll tillsammans med **Obskuriøst** och turkiska ninjor. Han var också svårt tilfreds med nr.2 (der ellers som bekendt voldte redaktøren så mange kvaler): Det var många intressanta artiklar som tex **3 Dev Adam**. Jag är själv mycket intresserad av turkisk genrefilm så det är alltid lika roligt när man får chansen att läsa något om dem. Så snälla fortsätt att ta med artiklar om turkisk film i fortsättningen också. Sedan så blev jag lite orolig när jag förstod att du hade skrivit om Supermen och Superguysfilmerna för jag håller nämligen själv på med en artikel om 3 Supermenserien och dess inofficiella uppförljare som de tyska och turkiska superguys filmerna. Men lyckligtvis så skiljer sig min artikel ganska mycket från din. Sedan så måste jag också säga att din ledare verkligen var träffsäker och underhållande. Det är en mycket bra tidning du gör Henrik och jag hoppas att du kommer att fortsätta att släppa nummer efter nummer. Mange tak for de rosende ord, Linus. Jeg lover, at **Obskuriøst** vil fortsætte mange numre endnu og afdække endnu flere uretfærdigt oversete film, til glæde for læserne. I et kommende nummer håber jeg således at kunne bringe en portrætartikel om Tyrkiets mest elskede filmskuespiller Cüneyt Arkin.

Stefan Stenbäck, også svensker, skriver til redaktøren på engelsk: *Congratulations for your superb peplum/Euro adventure film website [www.cultmovies.dk -Ed.]. You have done really outstanding and beautiful work with it. It's amazing that you have managed to collect all that material here in Scandinavia. These things are very difficult to track down in Sweden. Perhaps there are more peplum film fans in Denmark. Lucky you! Tak, Stefan, men der er ikke flere peplum fans herhjemme - snarere tværtimod. Det har til gengæld betydet at jeg kunne opkøbe de danske genre ex-rentals til små penge, netop fordi ingen regnede dem for noget. Stefan skriver videre, om jeg kan anbefale nogle gode videoantikvarier i København og evt. vil sælge ud af min egen samling. Tja, til det første må jeg sige, at det efterhånden ser sørgeligt ud. Video Netto på Vesterbrogade var tidligere en god kilde til fund af sære ex-rentals, men det er slut nu. Situationen er den samme i de øvrige filmforretninger og antikvarier - de som altså ikke har lukket. Til det andet: Jeg køber i dag mest DVD film, men ejer stadig en ganske velassorteret videosamling som har kostet ufatteligt meget både i penge og research at opbygge - og jeg sælger ikke!*

KIRK MORRIS

The Cinematic Adventures of an Italian Muscleman

By Graham Rix

The Italian-born Adriano Bellini used to be a gondolier before he first came into the movie world in a little 1960 peplum rip-off film, playing Samson, the muscle-bound Italian hero. He was just one of the dozen or so strongmen (others include Alan Steel, Reg Park, Mark Forest and Ed Fury) who burst into cinema screens in the early 60's beefcake craze, each hoping to be the next Steve Reeves after that particular titan's phenomenal success with the two **Hercules** movies. Adopting the American-sounding name Kirk Morris (which I shall call him from now on), the youthful Italian actor found success in stretching



his muscles in twenty known movies made over a ten-year period. Most of them were cheap peplum films in which he usually played the heroic character of *Maciste* or *Samson*, who travelled various periods in time righting wrongs and combating evil. When the peplum genre dried up, Morris, like his fellow contemporaries, moved into other genres, which included science fiction, westerns and war films (even a would-be musical!). After making his last movie in 1969, Morris retired from the business to move into other areas, leaving behind him a legacy of nearly two-dozen films. Admittedly, some of them tested the limits of bad-cinema viewing, but there are a couple of classics in there too and even the worst of his films can still be described as harmlessly entertaining, even if it's in a so-bad-it's-good kind of way. Physically, Morris never was the most imposing of screen heroes. That would be Steve Reeves or Reg Park. In fact he was rather lightly built and slim, his body well toned rather than overtly muscular. Nevertheless he had youth on his side (he must have been only in his twenties in his first peplum films) and his curled dark hair and boyish looks gave him the appearance of, say, an Italian Elvis impersonator!

His first starring role as a muscular hero is in 1960's **Samson against the Pirates** (Italian title **Sansone contro i pirati**, and renamed **Samson against the Sea Beasts** in America). The story goes that a pirate and his wicked crew are terrorising the oceans, kidnapping innocent women from merchant vessels and selling them on the slave trade market to garner huge profits for themselves. Their indecent behaviour goes unchecked until one day, when one man, the mighty Samson, decides to rebel against the evil pirates and stop their smuggling, kidnapping and other nefarious activities. Samson infiltrates their palace but manages to be captured and thrown into the dungeons, where he is chained and tortured. Meanwhile a heroic girl who has fallen in love with the muscular hero disguises herself as a Queen and makes her way into the palace in order to rescue him. Unfortunately her cover is blown and she too is captured, leaving Samson the only man alive who can rescue her. He does so by utterly destroying the pirate's headquarters, which takes the form of a huge cliff-side palace!

Samson against the Pirates is a low-budget but action packed movie which scales down the action of a Steve Reeves-type *Hercules* film and mixes in the strongman action with a bit of high seas adventure. There are some interesting and amusing caricatures including the old-school moustache-twirling chief villain and his bald-headed, imposing assistant. Samson is an appealingly old-fashioned hero and Kirk Morris does a good job with the role, although he's horrendously dubbed as usual in the US release. One difference here is that he gets to wear the rather dazzling combination of a leather waistcoat and thigh-high leather boots for the duration of the film's course, before reverting to musclemans loincloth for the outrageous finale! Samson is portrayed as a one-dimensional, superhuman being who is capable of ripping down huge stone pillars with only his bare hands and rippling muscles, and Morris is in his element with the action, which calls for him to fight off numerous armed guards.

In one sequence he is required to use his might to hold back a boat full of men rowing in the opposite direction; one slip means he plunges on to a row of poisoned spears below. It's this kind of old-fashioned spectacle that I love

and the film reaches new cheesy highlights in the finale, in which Samson ventures into a dank well and finds himself up against a mangy, rubbery crocodile! Altogether the film is a nice little peplum/adventure hybrid which takes in some interesting locations, from seedy torture chambers to the imposing pirate's lair, rickety old seaside towns and even a few (but not too many, remember the budget) encounters in the ocean. When it comes, the action is good and entertaining, but there are some unforgivable slow spots in between the punch-ups which make the film drag in places and relegate it to grade C movie status. Not a bad little film, all things considered, but it could have been so much more with better direction and a bigger budget.

1961's **Maciste against Hercules in the Vale of Woe** (Italian title **Maciste contro Ercole nella valle dei guai**) - sounds like a winner, doesn't it? Sadly, the title is something of a misnomer, mainly because there is no "vale of woe" in the film, and the would-be battle of the titans is actually a thirty second wrestling bout (!) between two muscle-bound actors, tacked on to the end of the film as if it were an afterthought. Instead, this is a comedy film starring Franco Franchi and Ciccio Ingrassia, who were a kind of idiotic Italian Abbot and Costello from the period. Following the success of George Pal's **The Time Machine**, the pair play a duo of boxing promoters who discover a time machine and decide to travel a year into the future, where they can find racing results and thus win lots of money by returning to the present time and betting on all the right horses. Inevitably, things go wrong and the pair is transported back to 5000 years BC. Mucho mildly amusing comedy antics ensue, taking the form of wordplay, cases of mistaken identity and lots of situation comedy as the pair make fun of all the peplum clichés, something in itself worth seeing.

It seems that *Hercules* (as played by bronzed musclemans Frank Gordon) is away fighting the Cyclops when Franchi and Ingrassia arrive in the kingdom, which is ruled by an unscrupulous usurper of the throne complete with an evil, pointy-bearded aide. The pair are initially treated as aliens after appearing in the middle of a courtyard from thin air and are due to be executed by being

turned into human candles! Luckily, modern knowledge of medicine, cha cha cha dancing and a few fireworks here and there convince the ancient folk that the pair are in fact powerful wizards who may be the only ones capable of defeating *Hercules*. When *Hercules* returns to claim his throne, the pair escapes into the countryside earmarked as traitors. Whilst there, they discover another musclemans living out in the woods by the name of *Maciste* (yep, it's Kirk). By playing on his ego and jealousy they convince him to go and have a fight with *Hercules* to find out who is the more powerful. Along the way the trio get trapped in the caverns of the witch Circe, who attempts to seduce *Maciste* and turn him into a pig! *Maciste's* girlfriend is having none of this and decides to rob him of his power by breaking a twig (!). The strength is transported to one of the 20th century travellers who then go on to fight *Hercules* in a wrestling bout to the death. Comedy antics ensue when *Maciste* regains his strength, leaving our erstwhile futuristic chum prone to the blows and beatings that *Hercules* doles out to him. Things conclude when *Maciste* arrives to battle *Hercules* proper, but the time-travelling pair don't get to see the outcome of the fight as they beat a hasty retreat and return to the 20th century.

Once you get used to the fact that this film is a modern comedy that makes fun of the peplum era, it becomes mildly entertaining and at least is packed with incident. Talking pigs, minotaurs, the Cyclops, Hyena men, dwarf wrestling, witches, magic, exotic dancing and feats of incredible strength keep the film bubbling away merrily and the central duo of Franchi and Ingrassia are more likable than you might at first expect, playing each other off well in the comedy antics and delivering lots of fast-paced comic lines. Frank Gordon steals the limelight as the bronzed, oiled muscular *Hercules* whom everyone is in awe of, whilst Kirk Morris seems something of an afterthought as *Maciste*. Firstly he doesn't appear until an hour into the movie and even then all he does is stand around looking good and achieving very little. Even his macho fight at the film's end is unforgivably cut short in favour of more slightly tiresome comedy from the starring duo. It doesn't help that the English dub-

bing gives him a Texan drawl for an accent, somewhat ruining the authenticity of his character! One hugely amusing aspect of the film is the time machine itself. Basically, it's little more than a table with two chairs and an umbrella balanced on it, which takes off with a simple puff of smoke! Far from the well-designed and imaginative creation that Rod Taylor used in the George Pal film. Still, this film could be a lot worse and it's light-hearted enough to be enjoyable throughout, and different enough to be worth tracking down.

The Triumph of Maciste (Italian title *Trionfo di Maciste*, renamed **Triumph of the Son of Hercules** in the US) is by all accounts a fairly bog-standard peplum yarn. Morris, playing the typical muscular-but-vacuous hero role of Maciste, must battle against an evil Queen who sacrifices innocent young women to a race of cavemen living in the base of a volcano. Much stone-throwing, rock-lobbing action ensues as Maciste leads a revolution against the enemy. Alas, this is the one English-dubbed movie that I was unable to secure for review purposes.

1962 saw Kirk Morris making **Maciste in Hell** (Italian title *Maciste all'inferno*, renamed **The Witch's Curse** in the US), which is arguably his finest movie. It's one of the first peplum films I saw and also my first exposure to Morris. I've been in love with it ever since and repeat viewings have followed. Whether its Riccardo Freda's steadfast direction, the bizarre situations or the excellent cross between strong-man and horror genres, which appeals to me, I don't know, but whichever way you look at it, it's a bit of a classic. The movie begins with a scene of a witch being burnt taken straight out of **The Mask of Satan** - no surprise that Mario Bava used to be Freda's frequent collaborator. Being a witch, she calls down a curse on her ancestors, but it does no good because the village folk still burn her to a crisp. Moving on to centuries later, a young woman and her bridegroom arrive in the same ancestral village, to find that time has stood still and that all of the prejudices and superstitions of the townsfolk persist; they believe she will bring evil upon the village, and so condemn her to the stake. The fires are lit, the crowd hungry for another death, when lo! Over the hill rides Maciste, clad only in a tight loincloth and riding bareback on a horse into town. Bear in mind that the setting for **Maciste in Hell** is seventeenth century Scotland and you'll have some idea of just how bizarre this spectacle is to see.

Maciste must move fast, as he has only days before the innocent girl will be burned at the stake. He decides to lift the witch's curse

upon the village by venturing into the depths of Hell and giving her a stern telling-off. Well, he can't exactly kill her, can he? I'm not



sure exactly what he intends to do, but he wades in anyway by uprooting a tree and jumping into a fiery pit in a field just outside of the village. This is where the fun begins. Freda's Hell is a jumble of classical imagery, Dante's Inferno and every cliché of Hell you can think of. It's a sulphurous combination of winding passages, burning chasms, the cries of the damned as they writhe and are tormented by grotesque grey demons, and booming caverns, all lit with an unhealthy red glow. Maciste finds himself up against a series of obstacles that would put Hercules to shame. For instance, he's pounced on by a lion, which half-mauls him before he manages to strangle it to death, then



he destroys his hands by pushing open a burning doorway. This is just for starters! Spiked ceiling traps, iron bars, giant snakes, burning chasms, a really ugly giant named Goliath, cattle stampedes, huge rocks and a man having his entrails eaten by an eagle are just a few of the tortures and dangers that Maciste faces. Although his fate is never really in question, Freda gets maximum muscle stretching from his able-bodied lead and the budget is high enough to make the Hell setting and its contents pleasingly believable.

An amusing sequence sees Maciste *discovering his true purpose*, which he does by looking into a pool which uses footage from previous peplum epics such as **Maciste in the Land of the Cyclops** (which don't ever star Kirk Morris) and have us convinced that they are his 'flashbacks'. An easy way of saving a buck by simply ripping off footage from previous unconnected movies! Kirk Morris is wooden - perhaps it's because he has so much screen time that you realise just how wooden he can be - but highly athletic when he needs to be, and

he convinces as the musclemen who can overcome every obstacle no matter how large or small. **Maciste in Hell** works as a peplum film - the near-constant stream of action makes it highly watchable and thoroughly enjoyable - and as a horror film, with the excellent set design, inventive special effects and the sheer imagination which has gone into making it. It all holds together nicely and serves as one of the high points of the genre - a definitive must-see.

Maciste and the Headhunters (Italian title *Maciste contro i carricatori de teste*, renamed as **Coloussus...** in America) is probably the Morris film with most mainstream exposure... but for all the wrong reasons. It was a hit on the US television series 'Mystery Science Theatre 3000' where the commentators oh-so-amusingly renamed his character as *My Cheese Stick* and generally ripped apart what is a fairly enjoyable B-movie, albeit one with the lowest budget of all. After rescuing some cavemen in a volcano eruption, hero Maciste takes the survivors on a raft to a new land which is inhabited by a peaceful race of village-dwellers, led by the just Queen Amoa, and a tribe of vicious head-hunters who roam the surrounding forests, slaughtering folk at will. Maciste is shot by an arrow and left for dead in the forest, but luckily the arrow shifts places from his chest to his shoulder and he revives. Unfortunately he is too late to save the village, which is being plundered and the leader of the headhunters kidnaps the Queen herself. An all-out war commences between the surviving villagers, the survivors of the volcano eruption and Maciste and the headhunters. After defeating the tribe, Maciste follows the leader to the lost 'Golden City' where he duly executes the villainous man.

Maciste against the Headhunters is a film mainly notable for its macabre imagery. Yes, there are lots of heads on sticks here as decoration, but my favourite spot is when Maciste and his chums explore a cobwebby old castle full of decaying skeletons and mad manacled prisoners. The budget is low and gives the film only a small scope with which to work (even the special effects have to be ripped off from another movie) but there are one or two decent battle sequences to be impressed by. Kirk Morris puts in his usual dependable performance here and gets to look like a better actor than he actually is thanks to the wooden supporting cast putting in poor turns, which are themselves made worse by some shocking English dubbing which replaced the Italian dialogue when the film appeared in the US. Although this is just a low-budget B-movie, it doesn't deserve all the ridiculing that it gets so often. The pacing is fast and the film is lean, concentrating on death and

danger over any bloated romance (a la a Steve Reeves peplum) and it delivers the goods action-wise. Predictable, yes; boring, no.

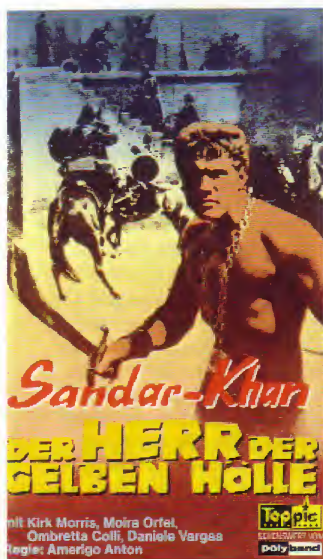
Clash of Steel (French title: **Le Chevalier de Pardailan**) sounds like a French swashbuckler, which it may well be, but it also stars Kirk Morris in the role of mythic musclemen Samson. Sadly I was unable to locate a copy of this movie, and am only guessing when I say it may be a peplum/swashbuckler hybrid along the lines of Alan Steel's **Hercules and the Black Knight**. Similarly, the unseen **Hercules, Samson and Ulysses** (Italian title **Erocole sfida Sansone**) sees Morris adopting the familiar role of Hercules, a doer of good this time up against not just one but two rival musclemen. Sounds great, but alas a fairly hard title to track down these days and one I had to skip.

After all of the arid, sun-bleached and rather predictable desert adventures that Morris was making at the time, it comes as something of a relief to see **Maciste against the Czar** (Italian title: **Maciste alla corte dello zar**, inexplicably renamed **Atlas...** for American audiences, and also known as **Giant of the Lost Tomb** in UK cinemas at the time and **Samson vs. the Giant King** also in America). This is one of those utterly strange films along the lines of **Maciste in Hell** and **Conqueror of Atlantis**, which seems to have some internal logic but is otherwise totally offbeat and weird when viewed by a modern audience. We first meet the vodka-swilling Czar Nicholas as he sends off an archaeologist and some of his guard to a remote cavern where he hopes to find mythical treasures. Not sure if they had archaeologists back when this film was set, but there you go. The Czar has one of those torture dungeons where peasants are strung out on the rack and whipped to within an inch of their lives, so you know straight off that he's the main villain of the piece. When a messenger returns to tell him that the fabled tomb he has been searching for has been discovered, he promptly has the man assassinated to keep the secret safe - that's gratitude for you!

Back at the cavern, the archaeologist prises open a huge stone tomb to discover the barely-clotted body of our favourite musclemen, Kirk Morris, lying quietly in a weird state of suspended animation inside. The film never does explain what Italian hero Maciste is doing laying about in this tomb or how he exactly got there, never mind the "suspended animation" that has kept him alive for centuries. The mystery just adds to the fun. Anyway, after a man rubs what appears to be baby oil into Maciste's chest (in a homoerotic sequence which goes on far too long for my liking), the

muscleman awakes and lumbers into action, lobbing huge rocks on to a band of brigands which the Czar has secretly employed to kill the party. Returning to the court, he is initially welcomed as a new addition to the Czar's army, but some typically beautiful Italian women turn up and tell him the truth about the Czar and his cruel, treacherous ways. The Czar's wicked aide (usually, films like this have a good leader who has been lead astray by the wicked aide, but they're both as bad as each other here, making for the ultimate double act in evil) slips Maciste a drug that will make him sleep for centuries - and burns the only antidote there is.

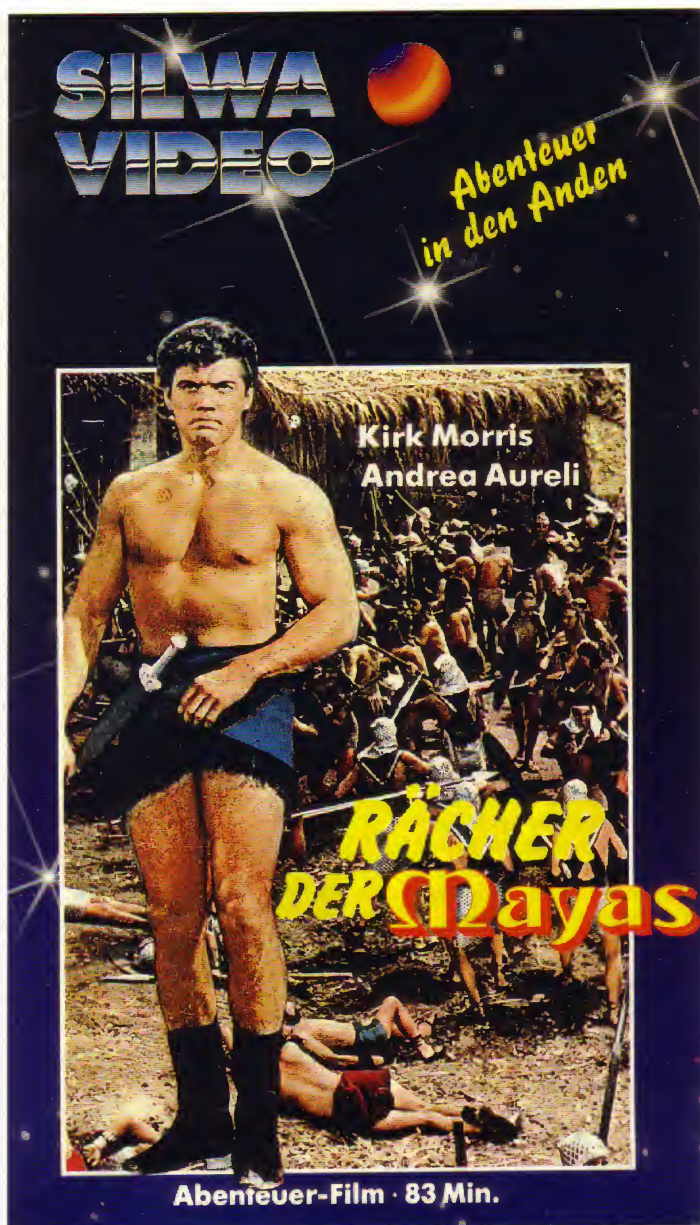
Needless to say, the wise old seer living in the hills finds a drug that restores Maciste to his splendour, and he goes into a fierce rock-tossing frenzy as he bumps off the guard at a slave camp and incites



a revolt against the Czar and his men. Maciste finds a secret underground tunnel leading back into the city, but must first fight a huge Neanderthal guy who is for some reason guarding the entrance - I have no idea who this cave-man-type is, but the sweaty fist-cuffs are certainly fun to watch. After beating the brute-man black and blue, Maciste and his friends destroy all of the Russian army. Maciste enters the court and picks up a huge table, using it to knock down another dozen of the bad guys. I mean, this table is unrealistically huge. About seven times the size of Kirk Morris. A very weird moment that I couldn't quite believe I was watching. Anyway I digress, the Czar is defeated, but in a cheat twist ending, he is led away to his fate off screen, so we don't get any much-needed murderous revenge, just an abrupt happy epilogue. It goes without saying that this peplum has one of the strangest, inexplicable plots I've seen, easily as weird as **Maciste in Hell**. Maciste's presence is never really explained, and the strongman himself suffers from memory loss throughout. The moments of spectacle are way over the top and seem to strive to better pre-

vious peplums that have come before, but on a smaller budget. Thus we have scenes of Maciste lifting items so huge as to dwarf him with ease, and straining his sweating sinews against the might of a dozen horses which pull away in opposite directions in a circle around him. The commonly available *Something Weird* print of this movie brings out some quality cinematography and as a whole the film is bright and takes in a variety of interesting sets and colourful costumes, making it a pleasure to watch. Kirk Morris settles comfortably into the strongman hero lead, and proves to be pretty charismatic during both the action and the quieter, more romantic interludes. As well as the glorious female leads, Massimo Serato steals his scenes as the scene-chewing bad guy Czar. I first noticed Serato as the wicked villain in the highly entertaining peplum **The Loves of Hercules**, and since then he starred either as villains or as wise leaders in both peplums and science fiction films, always turning in a solid and impressive performance. **Maciste against the Czar** is no exception. This is different enough to stand out from its peplum brethren and one of the best movies that Morris made.

At first glance, **Hercules of the Desert** (Italian title *La valle dell'eco tonante*) looks to be a strong contender for The Most Boring Peplum Film Award. It's yet another cheap, desert-set third rate adventure concerning the whims and intrigues of about four groups of warring Arabs, who spend their time plotting against each other and battling out in poorly-choreographed fights in the desert on horseback. At least the ladies are unusually easy on the eye here - not only do we get French beauty Hélène Chancel as a Princess, but 70's lust icon Rosalba Neri (**Lady Frankenstein**) is also on hand early in her career to pout and look gorgeous, which isn't difficult for her. After lots of boring character set-up and a few extras dying when papier-mâché rocks fall on their heads, hero Hercules (Maciste?) makes his long-awaited appearance in the form of a well-oiled and loincloth-clad Kirk Morris. This time around, Hercules appears in a puff of smoke in answer to a plea for help from the Gods! Interesting, as this is the first time I've explicitly seen Hercules (or Maciste, Samson, whatever his name happens to be) depicted as a supernatural heaven-sent being out to right wrongs. Hercules goes around, lusting after captured slave girls, throwing rocks at the bad guys and loafing around in a palace with the heaving bosoms of a heavily made-up Princess. Cue lots of bad acting, even poorer dubbing and theatrics which threaten to turn this film into a sappy melodrama. Lo and behold, the old "drugged wine" sub-plot is dragged out yet again as Hercules becomes sex



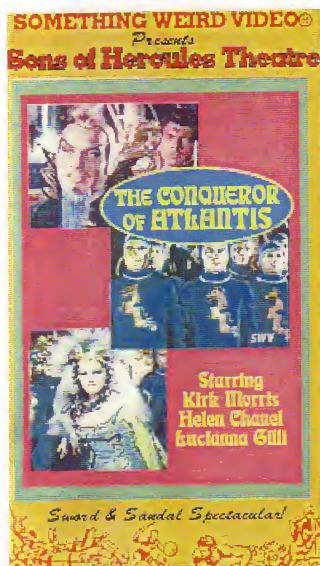
slave to an evil Queen and undergoes a personality change for the worse. Yet this plot strand is thrown aside as quickly as it began when he regains consciousness. What follows is an almost constant stream of action as Hercules finds himself fallen into a pit with closing walls (the only thing they lack are spikes, which I guess were too expensive) and throws some incredibly large objects at various bad guys (I mean HUGE objects - a massive statue here, and a rock five times his own body weight there). The best is yet to come, however, in the ultra-cheesy and inexplicable finale in which Hercules descends into an underground cavern, where he comes face-to-face with a race of huge-eared deformed Neanderthals who spend all their time beating huge sheets of hanging metal with hammers! The thunderous noise and sweaty sets mean that you can almost smell the sulphurous fumes in this section and, although I don't know what it meant, it sure was a lot of fun and made me forgive the less-than-impressive first half.

Hercules of the Desert also deserves mention as being the most openly homoerotic of

Morris' peplum films. The camera constantly lingers over his muscular physique and in one embarrassing scene he actually stands up and stretches and bulges his muscles for the camera! Watch out for the 'closing wall trap' scene in which the camera lingers on his thighs and loincloth... I think perhaps the cameraman got a little carried away with his zoom. Otherwise, this is adequate, sometimes amusing fun but far from the actor's - or genre's best.

The third film Kirk Morris made in 1964 was **Terror of the Steppes** (Italian title *I predoni della steppa*, and also known as **The Mighty Khan** in Germany and other parts). For a change, Morris isn't a mythical strongman; instead he's a valiant and good-natured warrior who finds himself up against the might of the barbarian empire when he revolts against a bald villain who enjoys roughing up and torturing the innocent in some memorable scenes of barbarity. The setting and time may be different but this is very familiar peplum-style stuff.

Morris initially wins out against the enemy, then gets captured, becomes a slave, is forced to



prove his might in some arena fights and finally beats the enemy hands down through strength and cunning; good prevails and evil falls aside in the dust. What **Terror of the Steppes** has to distinguish it is some beautiful photography of the Italian countryside; an epic-feeling score with some solemn singing; solid direction from Tanio Boccia and a pretty leading lady in Moira Orfei. Morris spends much of his screen time posturing around, with his hands on his hips; he's also blond-haired and moustachioed, and wears a black leather waistcoat, for a change. There are two good fight scenes to enjoy. The first sees Morris up against two barbarian warriors in a tough and strenuous wrestling bout, and the second is an impressive arena battle in which Morris and an opponent have huge logs strapped to their shoulders and run around trying to knock each other over. Not a great movie, but a solid and watchable one.

Unfortunately we now have a Morris film that appears to have become lost in the mists of time: **Desert Raiders** (Italian title **Il dominatore del deserto**). I can only guess it to be another costume adventure yarn re-using the desert locations that Morris seemed to spend all his life in during the period, but attempts to glean any info on this at all have been unsuccessful.

Next up is **Anthar the Invincible** (Italian title **Anthar l'invincibile**), yet another desert-set peplum, this time directed by cult favourite Antonio Margheriti (aka Anthony M. Dawson), and thankfully it's a lot better than his other peplum film **Hercules, Prisoner of Evil**. **Anthar** is the result of collaboration between three countries - Italy, Spain and France - and rather confusingly it has a different name in each country. In Italy it's **Anthar**, in Spain **Soraya, King of**

the Desert and in France **The Slave Merchants**. Just to make matters slightly more complex, the film was heavily edited for release in America as **Devil of the Desert against the Son of Hercules**, a rather unwieldy title whichever way you look at it. It is this US television print which is under review.

After the incredibly catchy "Sons of Hercules" theme tune finishes playing, we're thrown into the thick of the action, to witness the overthrow of a desert kingdom by a wicked tyrant. He murders the King, brutalises the Prince and attempts to marry the Princess, who would rather jump out of the window to her apparent death in the river below. Floating downstream, she is soon rescued by local hero Anthar (Kirk Morris, wearing what worryingly looks like an oversized nappy) and his rather irritating mute sidekick. After we witness the beginnings of a romance between the



Princess and Anthar, she goes off and gets herself captured by a band of evil slave merchants and marched back to the tyrant-run city. After a never-ending auction sequence that seems to last for hours rather than minutes, the Princess is sold for a princely sum to some rich Arab guy, but later than night Anthar invades and destroys the camp, rescuing girl in the process.

The second major plot strand now develops: it transpires that the Prince is still alive, kept hidden in the dungeons by the tyrant who murdered his father. Good old Anthar decides to single-handedly perform a jailbreak and manages to free the Prince, but gets himself captured in the process. After proving his might against a rhinoceros (!) in the arena, Anthar causes a rebellion and the acrobatic mute guy scales the city walls. The tyrant retreats to his lair, a hall-of-mirrors complex that confuses Anthar (and may well have inspired the climax of **Enter the Dragon**). Plenty of mirror-smashing antics ensue before the sneaky villain accidentally steps out of a window and falls to his death below. This is a fairly standard peplum yarn that benefits from a lively pacing and solid direction from Margheriti, assisted by one

Ruggero Deodato! The English dubbing results in plenty of ripe dialogue to be amused by (I particularly liked Anthar's *I'll rip your eyes out!* to an injured soldier) and the film sails by, incorporating the typical Italian lovelies in the cast, imaginative deaths for the villains (the impaling-by-portcullis scene is a real killer), exotic dancing and lots of macho sword-play and heroics. The edited print seems to have removed lots of plot exposition so what we're left with is an almost constant stream of action, which is fine by me. Kirk Morris is given the straightforward, simplistic role of a heroic, athletic and super-strong musclem and sails through the part effortlessly; having played it so many times before this comes as no surprise.

1965 saw the production of one of the most bizarrely edited movies of all time: **Maciste, Avenger of the Mayans** (Italian title **Il vendicatore dei mayas**). This slapdash peplum epic consists of footage from three separate movies rolled into one. The history behind it is fairly complex, so I'll let Henrik explain:

*This film has a rather complicated history. First there's **Maciste against the Monsters**, a 1962 peplum starring Reg Lewis, released uncut on Greek video, which was bought by American distributors, the inventors of the infamous but endearing **SONS OF HERCULES** series (completely unrelated films strung together by clever use of redubbing) and released for US TV as **Fire Monsters vs. the Son of Hercules**. Apart from the added cheesy theme song and spoken prologue poor Maciste suffers from the insult of being renamed "Maxxus" - but that's as far as the re-editing goes. The colours are rather washed-out, but the picture framing is in fact slightly better than the Greek print. The same year saw the not-so-spectacular volcano eruption from this film recycled for the opening sequence of the Kirk Morris peplum **Maciste** (in America: **Colossus**) **Against the Headhunters**. And even later director Guido Malatesta lifted extensive footage from both his films, tagged on a couple of new shots - result: the hilarious patchwork **Maciste, Avenger of the Mayans!**" [Private email to the author -Ed.]*

Watching this film is one highly confusing experience, especially when it's dubbed into a language you don't understand! Much of the film consists of footage from the previous two movies that Henrik mentions with new, added-in "linking" footage to rearrange said footage into a new order and thus creates the third movie. Therefore there are about four different warring tribes fighting each other in the movie and it's almost impossible to keep track of all the different characters. Luckily Maciste is the

straightforward hero character and his actions easy to follow and the plethora of babes are easy on the eye. As an exercise in almost pure action, the film works and the newly shot footage is fairly exciting and close to the look of the other films it copies. The finale of **Mayans** is a newly shot action sequence, which sees Kirk Morris battling against a giant, or at least a really tall bloke. Morris gives his all and the result is an impressive showdown between two super humans. The German video release of this film on the **Silva Video** label (entitled **Rächer der Mayas**) is stunning; with a beautifully crisp and crackle-free letterboxed print that gives the film a gorgeous look.

If **Mayans** wasn't enough, in the same year another film came out which ranks as one of the actor's best: namely, the unforgettably weird peplum/science fiction hybrid **The Conqueror of Atlantis** (Italian title **Il conquistatore di atlantide**, and also known as **Kingdom in the Sand** for its theatrical UK release back in the 60's). It was directed by the infamous Alfonso Brescia, an Italian renowned for his trashy and delightful movies, whose major claim to fame is that he made more **Star Wars** rip-offs than anyone else put together! The desert-set intrigue begins predictably enough with two warring Arab factions in the desert, and Kirk Morris caught in the middle. But lol! What are those unusual sounds emanating from beneath the desert? Who are the mysterious phantom raiders? The answer lies in the city of the title, of course, and it's up to Morris and his bearded pal to infiltrate Atlantis and destroy the evil that resides there.

This film really does have it all. Not only do you get a 300 year-old Queen of Evil and her companion, a Ming the Merciless wannabe wizard, but the film also packs in an army of sexy female archers, poor extras getting tortured by ray beams, Morris fighting with a death ray gun and finally, best of all, an army of gold-skinned autons who stamp around and engage in sweaty, strenuous battles with our long pants-wearing hero! The biggest disappointment is that, as a result of the poor budget, the city of Atlantis is a barely-seen tiny little model, which looks like something out of a cereal packet. Still, this is a minor element than can be easily forgiven - and forgotten - with all the cheesy action going on in the movie. The bonus comes from the casting of luscious Italian babes like Luciana Gilli and overacting bad guys like Piero Lulli. Interesting locations, fun effects, a wealth of hard-hitting action and plentiful screen time for hero Morris makes **Conqueror** one of the best Italian B-movies out there and a gem to be seen by all. I'll let Stephen Flaccasser, quoted on the Something Weird video sleeve,

have the last word on this film:

How strange of a movie is this? Hercules uses his real name, guns down the bad guys with a death

into the ground, the chief scientist, his beautiful daughter and a couple of male models venture into an underground cavern where they fight some stereotypical Chinese agents who believe



ray pistol and gets to wear long pants. KIRK MORRIS made more of these films than any of his contemporaries and they're worth the effort to see. This film shows Morris's great screen presence, his natural way of handling himself and a build that just won't stop. You'll never spot a stunt double filling in on one of Morris's films. [...] It will be hard to find another movie with this much beefcake, babes and bizarre bits.

1965 also saw the release of **2 + 5: Mission Hydra** (Italian title: **2+5 Missione Hydra**, and also cheekily re-released in the US in 1977 after **Star Wars** came out as **Star Pilot**). Hydra is a typically bad example of the Italian science fiction film, lacking in both coherence and budget. The "plot" - if you can call it such - concerns the alien astronauts on a UFO who leave their home planet of Hydra and crash land on (or rather, should I say, in) Earth. A team of scientists are sent to study the crash-site, but nobody realises where the spaceship is until they hold a microphone to the ground and hear heavy breathing! After an earthquake opens up a tunnel

that America is building a secret weapon against China and have come to stop production. Such Earth-bound shenanigans are forgotten, however, when the three-strong crew of the downed spaceship make their appearance after having watched the action on one of those "spy televisions" that Santo was so fond of. Leonora Ruffo is the flame-haired female space siren, aided and abetted by two PVC-clad male warriors with unpronounceable names. Yes, Kirk Morris is one of the aliens in a skin-tight suit, who stands around filling out his costume until later on in the movie when he takes his helmet off and becomes more noticeable. There are also some sad robot slave-men who recall the pessimistic Marvin in "The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy", although they get killed off pretty quickly and the Chinese agents replace them as slaves - a rather un-politically correct plot development for sure. The (model) spaceship takes off and launches into space for further exciting adventures. Bizarrely, after the human captives learn that they were to be studied in space and all hell breaks

loose as they rebel, the inhabitants of the craft take time out for a little space romance. The feisty Ruffo lets her hair down and chills out with one of the good-looking male models, whilst scientist's daughter Leontine May dons a space-age fishnet costume (with frilly bits, don't worry; this was only 1965) and cuddles up to the handsome Kirk Morris, who has by now removed his tight helmet to reveal that yes, he's got the best and most normal-looking haircut of all his movies. After landing on an asteroid and being menaced by tatty ape-men who look like rejects from **Planet of the Apes** and discovering a pair of spooky skeletal pilots on an abandoned vessel, our space travellers discover that Hydra has been destroyed through nuclear warfare and is now inhospitable due to the prevalent radiation: an abrupt and dire warning against nuclear weaponry. **2 + 5: Mission Hydra** is a poorly-made and badly-edited movie that refuses to be anything less than entertaining. The wealth of science fiction trappings (ray guns that turn men into flaming skeletons, robots, ape-men and space travel) combined with the wonderful space babes and poor effects make this a highly engaging viewing experience. Altogether the film has an ensemble cast, which means that Morris gets minimal screen time, and is used more as scenery than anything else. Watch out for fellow peplum veteran Gordon Mitchell, appearing in a one-scene cameo as the alien Murdu on a monitor!

The 1966 Spanish/Italian co-production **Falcon of the Desert** (Spanish title **El Halcón del Desierto**) unfortunately appears to be another 'lost' film, with absolutely nothing known to this author about the title. [A search I did on the Net resulted in a brief summary of the film: "The brother of a princess pledges her to a powerful prince as a peace offering, and then reneges [sic]". Some films are just impossible to get any information on! -Ed.]

1967's **Rita of the West** (Italian title **Rita nel west**, renamed **Crazy Westerners** in America) is a distinctly Italian blend of the comedy and western genres, directed by the reliable Ferdinando Baldi. When it works, on occasion, it can be very funny, but most of the humour is rather silly and unappealing to a modern audience. The story goes that cowgirl Little Rita is the real hero(ine) of the Wild West; not only can she easily beat famous anti-heroes like *Ringo* and *Django* without breaking a sweat, but she also has time to romance gold-seeker Black Stan and befriend Red Indian chieftain Silly Bull. The story kind of meanders from scene to scene and seriously runs out of steam towards the end; nothing much really happens in the latter half of this movie. A romantic sub-plot drags the pacing down

and the only thing to keep this watchable are the many stars in offbeat roles. Silly musical numbers and the deeply unappealing Rita Pavone who could sing, but certainly could not act in her Calamity Jane-type role don't help; Pavone is infuriatingly obnoxious - at least to this viewer - throughout the movie.

Kirk Morris appears early on in the production as the villain Ringo (usually a spagwest starring character), who robs the Red Indians of their gold and later takes out a gang of men at a local bar before being soundly beaten - not to mention blown up - by Little Rita. Morris does his best Clint Eastwood impression here as anti-hero Ringo and settles into the role with ease, making it his own: it's a shame he never got to play the part seriously, as I think he would have done well with it. Other familiar faces popping up include Gordon Mitchell's fitfully amusing Red Indian chieftain (you'll never see a stranger wig on Gordon's head, that's for sure), and Terence Hill, who is wasted in the part of Black Stan, the romantic, mysterious and rather boring hero. Hill has little to work with or do; he doesn't even get to partake in any of the humour, as he would later on in his career, so fans need not bother. After watching this film I'm really not sure what to make of it. The appearance of western clichés like Ringo, Django, the sweaty Mexican bandits and the Red Indians are all initially fun but after using them for comedic purposes the scriptwriters seem unsure of what to do with them, often opting to kill them off early-on instead. This means that there's no finale, because there are no villains left to have a showdown with! Worth seeing for curious fans but for the most part this is disappointing, and there's far too little screen time for Morris.

The 1968 film **Sapevano solo uccidere** is a spaghetti western, which sees a team of murderous bandits terrorising the land between New Mexico and Arizona. After killing an innocent man, they find themselves hunted down by his son Jeff, as played by Kirk Morris. Unfortunately this extremely obscure film never appears to have been seen outside of its native Italy.

Morris' penultimate known movie is the obscure 1968 Italian/West German war drama, **The Red Berets** (Italian title **Sette baschi rossi**, and also known as **Congo Hell**, **Seven Dirty Devils** and **Rebellion** in certain parts), no doubt retitled to fit in as a mock-sequel to John Wayne's **Green Berets** from the same year. This sweaty actioner boasts some location filming, but that's about all there is to identify it from the glut of similar war movies being churned out of Italy during the

period. The photography (I was lucky enough to see a letterboxed print) is often impressive, conveying the heat and humidity of the African landscape well. I especially liked the shot of a diseased river, covered by a million fat buzzing flies above. The various action set pieces are staged with relish by director Mario Siciliano (just starting out in the world of movie directing, Siciliano would later give the world spagwests such as **Trinity and Sartana are Coming** and the utterly obscure **Satanic Mechanic**, with Lee Van Cleef).

The story goes that a group of violent revolutionaries in the Congo have brutally murdered a previous squad of soldiers and taken possession of some vital documents which the powers that be - namely the African Government - need back. For some inexplicable reason they decide to send in some of the most unbalanced soldiers alive, including a German who shares Hitler's hatred of the black, a black soldier and Colonel, an Irishman, a trigger-happy British soldier and a female doctor to add to the sexual tension. Fans will be pleased to hear that the final member of the party, a troubled Frenchman hired to guide the soldiers through the dreaded swamps, is played by cult fave Ivan Rassimov, who instantly adds to the watchability of the movie. The Red Berets starts off happily enough as our heroes encounter snakes, surprise ambushes, jungle traps and other clichéd jungle dangers, but it's when the pressure increases that our heroes begin to fall apart and the movie takes a downbeat turn.

Scenes to watch out for include the German soldier snapping mentally and engaging in a one-

on-one fight to the death with Rassimov's Frenchman, and the epic set-piece finale in which our survivors are trapped on a stranded train in the middle of an isolated canyon whilst besieged by a huge army of kamikaze guerrillas in wide-scale action that gives **Zulu** a run for its money (**Zulu** was obviously an inspiration here too). Kirk Morris takes a fairly minor part in the proceedings, despite being one of the main characters. He plays a blond-haired Irishman (yes, I couldn't believe it either!) who's quick with a gun and proves to be one of the toughest men in the group. Yet Morris has little characterisation, other than a few quips to show his good nature and a scene of him carrying an orphaned black girl to show his kindness. Whilst various other characters stress out, die of malaria and go mad around him, Morris remains the tough, one-dimensional, slightly dumb soldier whose only job is to fight. Still, physically he does a good job; proving athletic in the fight sequences and still retaining the youthful good looks he had almost ten years earlier in his first peplums.

The last known film that Kirk Morris made is called **Overrun!** (Italian title **I Sette di Marsa Matruh**) and was released in 1969. Once again Mario Siciliano helms and this was apparently shot back-to-back with **The Red Berets** and shares many of the same cast members (Ivan Rassimov, Sieghardt Rupp). A group of three British soldiers find themselves stranded in the middle of a heated African desert during World War II and must fight to get themselves out. Along the way they pick up a British Colonel and a trio of British nurses whose plane has crashed into the desert.

Much of the film consists of the group trying to avoid detection from the overwhelming German forces and surviving attacks from a number of sources. Planes zooming in from the sky to open fire on our hapless heroes, a fierce sandstorm and a desert tribe of noble Arabs (seemingly left over from an earlier Kirk Morris sword-and-sandal flick) are just some of the potential dangers that our leads encounter over the film's course. They even capture a German soldier who can't speak English but still manages to embark on a doomed relationship with one of the British nurses. Finally, the British find themselves trapped on all sides in an abandoned fortress with only a couple of heavy machine guns against an army of tanks. Salvation lies in the smallest of possibilities...

Overrun! is an intense and entertaining movie which ranks as one of Morris' best - he definitely ended his career on a highlight. Location filming in Egypt adds to the authenticity of the production and the sweaty, humid atmosphere comes across well. This war film boasts a ton of action, shooting and plenty of exploding vehicles to keep it running along nicely. There's also a strong degree of characterisation as each group member are put through a tricky situation and a nice smattering of comedy from some Scottish characters to keep it from being too heavy. Most of the budget is saved for the impressive finale, an all-out battle between the British and the Arabs, who have joined forces, and the brunt of the German army. Great, thrilling stuff! One scene in particular sees our heroes in a jeep on top of a mine, which threatens to blow up any minute as they attempt to disarm it - a predictable but huge-

ly suspenseful danger. Although the movie won't win any awards for originality, the atmosphere, the action and the engaging characters are what count. For a change the whole ensemble cast are great in their individual parts, with special mention going to Ivan Rassimov who excels as the leading British Lieutenant. Kirk Morris (retaining his blond hair-do) plays a wounded Scottish soldier who harbours a secret throughout the movie and engages in some pleasing heroics at the film's close. The only flaw? Some really terrible dubbing - the British accents have to be heard to be believed.

And that, as they say, is that. Morris found that roles were drying up, so he changed career by going to America and moving into the advertising business. These days, he has slipped into obscurity unlike his friends Richard Harrison and Gordon Mitchell who are still very much in the limelight; he apparently now works as a movie producer in his home country of Italy but his exact whereabouts are unknown.

Many thanks to Brian at www.briandsdriveintheater.com for providing additional links and information!

- Graham Rix, Spring 2002



Having previously interviewed Gordon Mitchell for **Stay Sick! #3** I mailed him regarding the upcoming feature by Graham, hoping that he could tell us something about Kirk Morris the person. He very kindly replied a few days later:

Dear Henrik,

I am pleased to know that you are writing a piece about Kirk Morris. I believe his films were the campiest in the genre. **Maciste in Hell, Hercules of the Desert...** I did not know Kirk very well. He was much younger than me. He came by my gym in Rome, and I showed him how to get a little bigger. I remember he was very quiet. Were you able to get in touch with him for an interview? I have been trying for years to track him down. Nobody seems to know where he is.

Ciao!

Gordon

On the closing night of The Los Angeles Italian Film Awards (LAIFA), April 29 2002, Gordon Mitchell received a LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS. Congratulations, Gordon!

THE EUROPEAN HORROR FILMS OF CHRISTOPHER LEE

By Paul Hutchings

Christopher Lee's first horror-related mainland European film is the type you would have expected him to make when his popularity was fading, but the Dracula spoof **Uncle was a Vampire** (1959) was made when Lee was virtually at his peak. It's hard to imagine what circumstances brought Lee to appear in this production when he'd so recently made a huge name for himself in **The Curse of Frankenstein** (1957) and **Horror of Dracula** (1958). It starts with debt ridden Baron Osvaldo Lambertenghi (Renato Rascel) selling his ancestral castle to an organisation that has aspirations of turning it into a hotel. As part of the deal Osvaldo is given a job at the castle/hotel, but a baggage handler wasn't quite the occupation he had in mind. The guests start to arrive in their droves, and Osvaldo gets a letter from his Uncle Rodrigo (Christopher Lee). His uncle's (mysteriously coffin-sized) luggage has arrived and the letter indicates that Rodrigo will arrive later that night. Sure enough, at midnight the coffin opens, the two long lost relatives meet for the first time and all sorts of lunacy arises. The fact

that it took seven writers to concoct this nonsense shows that the backers of the film were taking it very seriously even if the film itself isn't. Christopher Lee looks even more statuesque than normal when stood next to the diminutive figure of Renato Rascel. This wasn't Lee's only Dracula spoof as he later made one in France - the even more obscure **Dracula, pere et fils** (1976). Although the direction on the print of **Uncle was a Vampire** that I've seen is credited to Pio Angeletti, it is common knowledge that the director was in fact Stefano Vanzina (or Steno as he is commonly known). This was Steno's first horror comedy; he'd later parody Hitchcock's **Psycho** (1960) with **Psycosis-simo** (1961), the giallo genre with **Il terrore con gli occhi storti** (1972) and Robert Louis Stevenson's **Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde** with **Dr Jekyll likes em Hot** (1979).

Lee's next Italian production was the first of two films that he made with the great Mario Bava and it is much more satisfying than **Uncle was a Vampire** in

every way. **Hercules at the Centre of the Earth** (1961) was made shortly after the hugely successful **Mask of Satan** (1960), which is perhaps how Bava managed to cast someone as prominent as Christopher Lee for it. Hercules (Reg Park) has to go on a quest to find a sacred stone and he also needs to rescue his girlfriend who has been captured for the purpose of sacrifice by the evil Lico (Lee). This was one of a small flurry of horror tinted peplum films from the early sixties - Riccardo Freda's **Maciste in Hell** (1962) and **Maciste contro il vampiro** (1962) by Sergio Corbucci and Giacoma Gentilomo being two of the others. The most entertaining peplums tend to be the ones that are fantasy-based and this one is no exception. This was Bava's first colour film and it looks fantastic. No other Italian director used colour as effectively as Bava did, and as a result **Hercules at the Centre of the Earth** manages to be a strange mixture of class and cheese. Lee's other Bava film was the underrated, and daring (for its time) **The Whip and the Body** (1963) in which Lee gets his kicks from whipping his mistress, and after his murder he returns as a ghost to seek revenge on his enemies. It's slower than many of Bava's other films but is at least as atmospheric and stylish as his most celebrated works. Kurt is definitely one of the most controversial characters that Lee would play, which resulted in the film's heavy censorship at the time of its release in many countries. A lot of people don't realise that Lee later worked with Mario Bava's less talented son, Lamberto, on one of his made for TV fantasy's - **Sorellina e il principe del sogno** (1996).

The story of **Crypt of Horror** (1963) is a whole lot more traditional than **The Whip and the Body**. Sira Karnstein is executed, but before she dies she vows to take revenge on her own family. Hundreds of years later there is another Karnstein, called Laura, who is the spitting-image of Sira. Laura's father, Count Ludwig (Lee), has fears for his daughter's safety so he employs a researcher to see if there really is a curse on the family. **Crypt of Horror** was Christopher Lee's first black and white Italian horror film and is fairly well made but it has nothing on Mario Bava, which it is obviously imitating. Although it is based on Sheridan Le Fanu's "Camilla", like several other films, its existence owes more to the

success of **Mask of Satan**. It's not just the story that makes you think of Bava but also the moody lighting, although the film isn't not half as assured as Bava's work.

Much more interesting is Antonio Margheriti's **The Virgin of Nuremberg** (1963), which is also set in a castle, but a little more imagination has gone into this one. The castle's owner is away, and his wife Mary is staying there, getting spooked by all the talk of



"the punisher" whom everyone else in the castle believes is committing the recent murders. Lee plays a creepy butler who protects the murderer who happens to be a disfigured Nazi war criminal. There are one or two quite grisly moments for the time, such as the discovery of a woman's body inside an iron maiden who's had her eyes pierced by spikes, but the most famous sequence is when a rat in a cage is strapped to a woman's head and it decides to take a chunk out of her nose. The over dramatic music by Riz Ortolani can be a little irritating at times, but that is a minor quibble for what is a solid horror with one or two quite interesting ideas. The film that **The Virgin of Nuremberg** resembles the most is **Bloody Pit of Horror** (1965), which also features a masked sadist killing the occupants of a castle and it is similarly colourful.

The Castle of the Living Dead (1964) was directed by Luciano Ricci and Lorenzo Sabatini, but the most interesting credit is of



Englishman Michael Reeves who was the second-unit director and co-writer of the film. After this he directed an Italian horror quickie of his own, called **The She-Beast** (1966), and then a couple of British films including cult favourite **Witchfinder General** (1968), until his untimely death from a drugs overdose (suicide?). Not only did **The Castle of the Living Dead** mark the beginning of Michael Reeves' career but it was also the cinematic debut of popular actor Donald Sutherland, who's first appearance in the film as an old hag is worthy for inclusion in one of those "before they were famous" TV shows. He also plays a sergeant in the film, and you'd never guess from his clunky performance that this was an actor who was going places. A travelling troupe of entertainers make their way to a castle where they meet Count Drago (Lee with a pointy beard), who has a strange obsession with the quest for eternal life. The entertainers perform for the count and one of them dies when their mock-hanging trick goes horribly wrong. This tragedy brings opportunity for the Count as it gives him a body to experiment on. The script is better than most Italian gothic horrors and even manages to be quite inspired at times - *We'll all be changed in a twinkling of an eye*, is part of Drago's speech at a



funeral, and at this precise moment someone inside the castle has an arrow shot in his eyeball. Not a bad film but the ending just kind of fizzles out.

Christopher Lee's most obscure Italian film is **Sfida al diavolo** (1965), which although I've not yet seen it, apparently features Lee playing another sinister Count in a castle that is visited by unwary travellers. Not only is the film obscure but so is the director Giuseppe Vaggezzi who doesn't seem to have made anything else, which is more than can be said about Jesus Franco. One of the most intriguing of partnerships that Christopher Lee had, was with this prolific Spanish filmmaker. What Franco gains in quantity he loses in quality and even though he has quite a loyal follow-

ing his films can, in all honesty, be quite a chore to sit through. Lee played Fu-Manchu on five occasions, which makes it the character that he played the second most, after Dracula of course. These were all produced by Harry Alan Towers, starting with Don Sharp's British production **The Face of Fu-Manchu** (1965). As the series progressed they also rapidly deteriorated in quality, and once Franco made the two final entries they were really scraping the bottom of the barrel. Despite this, the standard is a lot higher than the average Franco film, as he seems to be inspired to try a lot harder to produce better quality films when working with someone of Lee's calibre. The two Franco Fu-Manchu titles were **The Blood of Fu-Manchu** (1968) and **The Castle of Fu-Manchu** (1969). The megalomaniac Chinaman, Fu-Manchu (Lee), would have made a perfect arch-enemy for Batman or James Bond. His quest for world domination throughout the series became ever more devious, such as in **Castle** when he terrorises the world with a device that can freeze water. The pre-credits sequence shows a ship ploughing into an iceberg in the Caribbean! I was tempted to say that it was all done with less than the catering budget of **Titanic** (1997), but knowing Franco, the money spent on it would have probably bought Leonardo DiCaprio a sandwich!

The Bloody Judge (1969) is one of Franco's most acclaimed films and like several other movies from this era its principle inspiration was **Witchfinder General**. Lee is the Lord High Chief Jeffries of England who keeps the population in check with his fascism, and those that don't conform are accused of witchcraft so they can be executed. This is one of the few Franco films that is actually quite pleasing on the eye; the scenery and the costumes make it far classier than his usual fare. A bright red costume and long white wig would be too overpowering for most actors, but the general authoritarianism that Lee projects allows him to wear such things and get away with it.

Like **Sfida al diavolo** Franco's **De Sade** (1970) is another film that I've still not managed to see. The writings of the Marquis de Sade were Jesus Franco's favourite subject and you can see the influence right through his work. This is the film that Christopher Lee was most ashamed of, and reportedly he even requested that his name be withdrawn from the credits - so it must be worth trying to track down for that fact alone! Also from 1970 came Franco's **El Conde Drácula** which must be one of the most interesting European productions Lee was involved with due to its serious take on the story that made Lee famous. It borrows a little from the Countess Bathory inspired films in the way that Lee starts off

being quite elderly and gets younger throughout the film by being rejuvenated by the blood of virgins - not bathing in it like Bathory but by drinking it. **El Conde Drácula** is quite a refreshing version of the Dracula story and it manages to avoid looking too much like a Hammer rip-off.

All of the Lee/Franco films mentioned here were truly international co-productions, each of them being financed by at least four countries. This article is dedicated to Lee's non-British European horror films, but some were partly British and partly produced by other European countries, so I'd better give those titles a mention.



The Spanish/British horror film **Horror Express** (1972) has British explorer, Professor Saxton (Lee), finding the frozen body of a half-ape, half-man creature in China, and he puts it on board a train for transportation. Unsurprisingly the creature comes back to life, and starts murdering people on the train. Peter Cushing plays a rival scientist who takes an interest in Saxton's find, and discovers that the creature's victims have been drained of memory. This marvellously ludicrous plot has guaranteed that **Horror Express** has gained quite a cult following and it's certainly one of Lee's most entertaining European horror films.

The 1961 adaptation of **The Hands of Orlac** was a French/British production, whilst Hammer's ill-fated attempt to modernise, **To the Devil a Daughter** (1976) and the Edgar Wallace based krimi **Psycho-Circus** (1966) were both German/British productions. Lee was also in a couple of solely German films, another krimi, called **The Puzzle of the Red Orchids** (1962), and the luridly titled **Torture Chamber of Dr Sadism** (1967). In **Torture Chamber**, Lee plays Regula, a Count who has been found guilty of torturing and killing 12 people in his castle. In a direct steal from **Mask of Satan** he has a spiked mask pushed into his face, but because the mask looks like Mr Punch, the scene manages to be

more amusing than sinister. Regula is then taken outside, has his limbs tied to four horses and they are torn out of their sockets. Naturally, before this execution Regula placed a curse on his prosecutor (Lex Barker) and promises to take revenge on him and his family. Thirty-five years later, the son of the prosecutor (also played by Barker) is strangely drawn to Regula's castle, where the Count gets reawakened, looks for revenge and tries to claim a 13th victim which will give him eternal youth. Okay, so **Torture Chamber** isn't the most original film in the world, and includes other familiar clichés such as a cowardly coachman, and the villagers who react in terror when asked where Count Regula's castle is located. The plot itself may be unoriginal but Harald Reinl has at least directed the film with a surreal edge that differentiates it from others. The most bizarre sequence is the coach ride through a creepy forest where the coachman imagines the branches of the trees being made of human arms and legs. Although the film has its roots in traditional horror its execution is quite modern, and this includes the unusual soundtrack. The castle interiors are very appealing too, making this one of the most visually interesting of European gothic horrors.

There's little doubt that Christopher Lee's participation in these films always lifted them to a greater degree of quality than they otherwise would have been, and his presence in some of the cheesier ones gives them some much needed class. These productions were even cheaper than Lee's British films, but to his credit, he always performed with just as much dignity and suaveness that he's always been associated with. It's unfortunate that the majority of these European films are ignored by the public-at-large - perhaps even Lee himself would prefer to forget most of them? However, there is a substantial following for these films amongst fans that like to delve deeper into the darkest corners of Christopher Lee's filmography, so it's unlikely that they will ever be forgotten completely.

Paul Hutchings is the webmaster of www.so-sweet.cwc.net, dedicated to Italian cult movies. Check it out! -Ed.

ET GENSYN MED FØRSTE KLASSES SUPERMÆND

Af Jack J.

Det er så længe siden, jeg gik i første klasse, at der kommer støv op, når jeg hoster. Det var skoleåret 1970/71. Stedet: Tårnborgh skole ved Korsør. Af grunde, der fortæber sig i fortidens dunkle muld, havde jeg meldt mig til skolens efterårsfilmklub. Årsagen var muligvis, at man ville vise en gammel Tarzan-film, og jeg kendte abemanden fra bogen "Tarzan - Abernes Konge" af Edgar Rice Burroughs, som min mor havde læst op af (det var først mange år senere, at jeg fandt ud af, at alle danske udgaver af bogen var gennemcensureret - for at beskytte mig og alle andre raske drenge i det gemytlige og ikke for voldsomme Dannevang. Det er faktisk først for nyligt, at den er kommet i sin helhed på dansk). Jeg husker det ikke med sikkerhed, men mener, at filmen var **Tarzan the Ape-man** fra 1932 med Johnny Weissmüller i hovedrollen (Weissmüller blev i øvrigt senere gaskgag og blev lukket inde på en tosseanstalt, hvor han rendte rundt og gjaldede de store hanabers sejrskrig ligesom i filmene!). Af de andre film husker jeg desværre kun brudstykker: En var en blodig western, der begyndte med en fyr, der gemte sig bag et træ og ligeså snart han kiggede frem, fik han en kugle i øjet i closeup; En anden var en ubehagelig kriminalfilm, hvor en skurk med en elektrisk jernhånd brændte sine ofre i ansigtet, så de lignede brændt toastbrød, og endelig var der en fantastisk film om tre supermænd. Den eneste, jeg kunne huske titlen på, var sidstnævnte, der på dansk var kommet til at hedde **Tre Fantastiske Supermænd**! Jeg husker også, at jeg havde fået en seddel med filmsæsonens program på og under et besøg hos mit fædrene ophav fornyelig, splittede jeg det skab ad, som i sin tid blev brugt til at opbevare skolepapirer, i håbet om, at der ikke skulle have været ryddet op siden ca. 1970. Det var der desværre! Længe gik jeg og slog mig til tåls med, at jeg nok aldrig ville finde ud af, hvad det var for film, jeg som en lille purk (senere punk ha ha) havde fået ind på indersiden af nethinden. Men som tiden er gået, har jeg alligevel gået og udfrittet nogle af de andre filmfreaks og fornyeligt gav det sørne bonus! Redaktøren af bladet, du holder i hånden, ringede entusiastisk og fortalte, han havde budt på og vundet en film på Internettet. En italiensk film med den engelske titel **Three Fantastic Supermen**!! Kunne det være så simpelt? Jeg var naturligvis begejstret, men holdt dog begejstringen på et moderat niveau: Sagen er jo den, at der i Italien altid blev lavet masser af ofte næsten ens film i de samme genrer, check blot #1, hvor Frank Brahe anmeldte (eller hvad det nu var han gjorde) hele fire superheltefilm. Min moderate begejstring skyldtes også, at den ene scene, som jeg kunne huske fra **Tre Fantastiske**

Supermænd, den mente Henrik ikke var med i filmen. Scenen, som jeg huskede den, var supermændene, der mødes i et lokale for at blive briefet om deres kommende job. Een af dem får en sodavand, men i stedet for at lukke flasken op med en olåbner, stikker han da bare sin tommelfinger igennem kapslen!! Det var sgu noget, der kunne imponere, dengang i første klasse. Denne scene bevirkede i øvrigt, at **Stay Sick!**'s redaktør udviklede tommelfingrekraft, så undertegnede i dag aldrig lukker flasker op med en oplukker, men blot stikker tommelen igennem kapslen! Da jeg så endelig fik tilsendt Henriks bånd, tog det vist en hel uges tid, før jeg smækkede det i videoen. Øjeblikket skulle være det rette, ingen udenomslarm, ingen støjende telefoner, ingen ingenting til at distrahere. Øjeblikket skulle være det rigtige og minutterne før "forevisningen" føltes lettere surrealistiske. Ligesom James Ellroy, der lugtede til sin mors kjole i LAPD's bevismaterialearkiv, 37 år efter hun blev myrdet. Og ligeledes skulle jeg nu genforenes med en superheltefilm, jeg havde set ca. 31 år tidligere! (nå ja, med mindre det var den forkerte film, forstås!). Filmene rullede og heldigvis var det den rigtige. Jeg var tilbage på første række (een eller anden havde sagt: "De små ska' sidde forrest"! i Tårnborgh skoles kælder (a truly spooky place). Samme år udsendte Gasolin' deres første LP! Og hvordan var den så? Well, handlingen kort: **Tre Fantastiske Supermænd** begynder med noget avisinfo, om en række tyverier begået af to dristige tyvekægte i røde sparkedragter, med andre ord; de to første "supermænd"! På et nyoprettet lands ambassade er en FBI-agent i gang med at lægge planer, for at lokke de to supermænd/tyve til at hjælpe ham med et røveri af nogle falske penge (don't ask why), men de to supermænd tager kegler ved at røve ambassadens pengeskab først! Så skal FBI-agenten have fat i pengene igen og det blir til en lang slåskamp mellem de to superhelte og FBI-agenten med alle hans mænd. De to helte tæsker alle assistenterne, men har problemer med den adrætte FBI-agent, og da denne med et håndkantsslag flækker et bord, som den ene står på, så beslutter de at give ham en sodavand i stedet og invitere ham til at slutte sig til dem. Og her kommer så sekvensen med kapslen, der ryger af ved tommelens hjælp af FBI-agenten (og altså ikke som jeg huskede det af en af supermændene). Rent faktisk gør han det hele to gange i filmen og det er måske derfor, det fæstnede sig så godt i hukommelsen. Senere fortsætter handlingsforløbet støt frem og tilbage med de to oprindelige superhelte og den nye, der alle vil have fat i pengene, og der er også en genial opfinder, hans onde ex-assistent, mennesker,

der bliver klonet, endnu flere onde skurke og sexede italo-kvinder i sand 60'er stil! Der er masser af action og stunts i **Tre Fantastiske Supermænd**, hvilket jo er fint nok, men der er uheldigvis også en hel del Trinity-agtig falde-på-halen-komik, og ærlig talt, så *hader* jeg film med Trinity brødrene! Da jeg så **Tre Fantastiske Supermænd** første gang, så jeg sikkert ikke filmen som delvis komedie, men som ren action pga. jeg ikke forstod dialogen. Eller måske syntes jeg, den var morsom? Jeg husker det ærlig talt ikke. Den version, som Henrik havde fået fat på, var en tysk-dubbet udgave (med flot billede i lbx) og jeg har normalt ingen problemer med den tyske dialog, hvis ellers jeg er opmærksom på, hvad der bliver sagt, men da jeg genså filmen første gang, undlod jeg med vilje at lytte efter, hvad der blev sagt, så præmisserne for at "oplevelse"



filmene mere eller mindre var de samme som i 1970/71. Da jeg genså filmen anden gang, lyttede jeg efter dialogen, men det gjorde nu ikke den store forskel: indholdet er ligeså fjollet som skuespillet. Men hvordan lyder dommen så? Var jeg skuffet eller bare glad for endelig, efter mere end et kvart århundrede, at have genset en af de første film, jeg overhovedet så? Hm, for en gangs skyld er jeg ikke helt så skråsikker som ellers! Jo, det var en stor oplevelse at gense en af de film, jeg havde længtes efter at gense i så mange år, men jeg må nok indrømme, at jeg samtidig var skuffet: Måske er det bare mig, der er blevet et surt, gammelt røvhul med ondt i ryggen, men jeg kan ved den sødeste grød ikke klare disse imbecile fjollefilm á la Trinity-brødrefilm! Sorry, herr redaktør, jeg ville heller end gerne have skrevet en entusiastisk artikel, hvori jeg "opdager" et

kanonfedt, glemt/overset superhelte-actionmesterværk fra tresserne, men jeg kan ikke. Når sandheden skal frem, så var jeg jævnt irriteret over tåbelighederne i filmens første times tid, begge gange jeg genså filmen, og hen mod slutningen skvattede jeg i søvn - også begge gange! Men det betyder naturligvis ikke, at du, kære læser, ikke skal se **Tre Fantastiske Supermænd**, bare fordi jeg ikke kunne holde den ud. Det kan jo alligevel godt være, at du synes, den er det bedste siden rugbrød i skiver! Redaktøren af **Oriental Cinema**, Damon Foster, begyndte faktisk at udgive et helt nyt blad for nogle år siden, der hed **Heroes on Film**, udelukkende for at kunne fortælle folk om netop **Tre Fantastiske Supermænd**, fordi han syntes, den var totalt genial! Så tag og check den ud og dan dig din egen mening. *However, having said all of the above*, så skal det dog også lige nævnes, at jeg naturligvis er rigtig glad for endelig at have fået løst et af fortidens mysterier, og stor tak til Henrik for endelig at få det gjort muligt. Jeg har i øvrigt senest fundet ud af, at man faktisk kan få den engelsk-dubbede version fra Video Search of Miami i... øh... Miami, så for en gangs skyld behøver læsere uden kontakter dybt ind i samlerkredse ikke at rive sig i håret over ikke at kunne komme til at se en af de film, der blir anmeldt i et dansk genreblad! Nu mangler jeg så bare at finde de andre film fra filmklubbens sæson anno 1970/71!!

NB:og tillyk' med fødsdagen, Henrik!

Jo, jeg er nu ganske vist nået den alder - 35 - hvor man ikke længere ligefrem ser frem til dagen. Men tak alligevel, Jack, og du behøver ikke undskyldte, at genseet med din barndoms film var en oplevelsesmæssig fuser. Jeg blev nemlig selv ret skuffet. Hvor fortsættelsen, **Three Fantastic Supermen in the Jungle** - se Franks artikel i #1 - er uahæmmet skæg & slapstick, forsøgte denne snarere at efterligne de mere 'seriøse' agentfilm fra perioden. Scenen med sodavandskapslen må vist være undgået min opmærksomhed; måske sov jeg også? Jeg vil i øvrigt lige benytte lejligheden til at bemærke overfor nye læsere som måtte være interesserede i flere artikler om gakkede superheltefilm, at #1 og 2 af **Obskuriøst** stadig kan bestilles, omend der kun er 4-5 eks. tilbage af #1. -Ed.

KILIC ASLAN (LION MAN)

By Ayman Kole

In 1975 Natuk Baytan, a popular Turkish director of mega-violent crime escapades, decided to helm a particular historical, and I use that term loosely, film called **Kilic Aslan**. Baytan, himself no stranger to action films set in historic times after collaborating with Cüneyt Arkin in the notorious and extremely entertaining *Kara Murat* series, was the perfect choice. And guess who was brought in the play the lead - you knew it, Cüneyt Arkin.

body counts, heaps of violence, mind-blowing action scenes and you can't go wrong!

Not surprisingly, the 1975 Turkish production **Kilic Aslan** was dubbed in English and distributed overseas as **Lion Man**. It even spawned a sequel by a rival production house, this time bringing in American actor Frank Morgan as the title character to make it more marketable for foreign eyes. But, needless to say, without Arkin in the role, the flick

loyal subject barely manage to escape. After being pursued in the wilderness by the bloodthirsty soldiers of Antoine, the pregnant Queen gives birth! The loyal subject takes the newborn Prince and hides him while he tries to confront the enemy. The Queen dies and after thwarting the ghostly hooded soldiers, the loyal man returns to find the baby snatched by lions.

Ah, what to do, what to do?

The word gets out that the heir to the throne has been killed, and this delivers a severe strike to bands of rebels planning to restore peace and justice throughout the land, and rescue themselves from the barbaric intentions of Antoine; who has crowned himself Emperor. Years pass, and the young prince seem to be quite at home killing wild animals, eating raw meat and feeding his pet lions. Looking more like Tarzan, the prince of lions has his first human interaction when a bunch of prisoners are being tortured in the forest. Lionman comes to the rescue in a bloody and amusing fight sequence. In a display of Hercules-like strength, Lionman man rips a tree out of the ground, with its roots, and rams his way into the torturers, then vanishes.

Meanwhile, an underground resistance group plans to overthrow Antoine and his despotic occupation. In order to strike at Antoine, an assassination is planned on his son, a young commander in the army called Altar. Not knowing the difference between the good guys and the bad guys, Lionman sees Altar in serious trouble and comes to his aid, bungling the assassination attempt for good. However, Lionman's social skills aren't developed at all and once again he runs off into the forest. Gee, he really is a shy one isn't he?

Well, not exactly because the first time he meets a woman, Lionman offers her a bunch of leaves. The woman rejects them and knifes him in the back - it's amazing the pain a bunch of roses saves us these days. Coffee anyone? But, the plot thickens and it's not all Tarzan all the way. It is soon discovered that the crazy dude who lives with lions is none other than King's son, and the rightful heir to the throne. The rebels make contact with him, teach him Turkish - or English if you're watching the dubbed version - and Lionman quickly acquires the fine skills of a brilliant warrior.

What follows is a series of highly entertaining violence, with heaps of body count and splashes of blood to satisfy many thrill seekers. The rebels are ambushed by Altar, who is praised by a very proud Antoine. But, there is a cool development, Altar turns out to be Lionman's long lost brother, raised in secret by Antoine!

A death match is secured between Altar and Lionman, but just as the deathblow is about to be delivered by Lionman, a crazy woman caged like a wild animal blurts out the secret. The woman is none other than a princess who had an affair with the King years ago, and is Altar's mother! Whoa? Now this is really something.

During escape, Lionman's hands are melted with acid. Altar also escapes and joins the noble cause on the side of the rebels. Lionman however will never swing another sword again; his hands are practically useless after this horrid incident. Suffering what looks like a medieval mid-life crisis, Lionman finally comes to grips with himself and hatches an ingenious plan. He gets the local blacksmith to make him lion-claws! In an instant his useless hands are transformed into the most deadly weapons ever committed to cult cinema. Before you can say *Freddy Kruger*, the tempo is upped once again and a full-scale battle is launched, led by the king of lions. This time, more brutal, gory and wilder than ever!



What follows is one of the most eye-popping climaxes cult fans are likely to witness. Lionman claws up a huge castle, punches through stone walls, rips the face off all opposition and saves the day in a tremendously gory and violent fashion.

All in all, a terrific film to enjoy if you're in the mood. The film is so insane, wild and fun that it's just got to be Turkish. Welcome doses of the fantastic, some over-the-top action scenes, but would we really like them any other way?

Praise to director Natuk Baytan, and Turkish action legend Cüneyt Arkin for this stunning collaboration - **Lion Man**.

Curious about this and similar Turkish cult titles? Feel free to mail obscenevideos@hotmail.com for further information. -Ed.



Cüneyt Arkin is a well-known personality in Turkey, as he cut his teeth by starring in many hyper-violent action films. These films are gems in their own right, as the very charismatic and acrobatic Arkin pleased his audiences, hungry for violence, by playing cops, heroic soldiers, gangsters, hit men, mysterious avengers and legendary folk heroes. Today, these films are starting to be largely discovered by eager Western audiences. Lots of blood, astronomic

was a failure and ended the series abruptly.

Having said that, the original **Lion Man** film is a buoyant treat. A brave Turkish ruler crushes Byzantine forces and captures a major city, in medieval times. Just when peace and negotiations are being settled, a treacherous Byzantine commander Antoine ignites a gruesome takeover and slaughters the new King and all his noble followers. Well, just about, as the King's pregnant wife and a

EN FILMFANTAST I ET LAND AF MUSKELMÆND - RICCARDO FREDAS PEPLUMFILM

Af Thure Munkholm

Da Henrik bad mig om at skrive noget til et kommende nummer af **Obskuriøst**, tvivlede jeg et kort øjeblik, for jeg vidste hverken det helt store om peplum eller kostumefilm, ej heller havde jeg i de tidligere 80'ere drevet piratvirksomhed i en grad, der gør det spændende at skrive om. Men efter en smule snak frem og tilbage blev jeg enig med Henrik om, at det kunne være sjovt at skrive noget om den Riccardo Freda vi alle kender for hans væsentlige bidrag til den italienske horrorfilms historie, men fra en lidt anden vinkel. Selv havde jeg kun set en enkelt af Fredas peplumfilm, nemlig den underfundige blanding af gotisk gys og ægte peplum, som han med **Maciste all'Inferno** fik stablet på benene; men da Henrik fra sin samplings dyb kunne ryste op med en del andre film fra Fredas hånd, fik jeg blod på tanden.

Det, der fascinerer mig ved Fredas horrorfilm er det samme, som jeg beundrer hos hans tidligere kameramand Mario Bava. De er begge instruktører, der tænker i billeder frem for skuespil og farver frem for handling. Uden at jeg dog vil sammenligne de to instruktører rent indholdsmæssigt, har de dog, alene eller i fællesskab, stået bag nogle af de flotteste italienske 60'er og 70'er b-film. Eller det vil sige, at det, der i dag går under betegnelsen b-film, egentlig var datidens mainstream-film, for med mainstream film går det jo ofte hverken værre eller bedre end, at de bliver glemt. Herefter er det så op til eftertidens filmfacionados at gennemse og fælde dom over tidligere tiders *crowd pleasers*. Og måske er det ikke så dårligt at huske på, når man ser på Fredas peplum film i dag. De er alle lavet i kommercielt henseende for at føde et hungrende publikum, der gang på gang vil overraskes og se noget nyt; der gang på gang vil forlade biografens sæder og forsvinde i det ene filmiske eventyr efter det andet. Og set med de briller er Freda en glimrende instruktør, der altid har forstået at strække sine budgetter til det yderste. Han har med sine ofte meget få midler alligevel formået at bringe sine tilskuere tilbage til det gamle rom, til Kina eller endog på rundtur i Helvede.

Og når det ofte lykkedes for Freda at genskabe hele historiske eller litterære miljøer, er det først og fremmest fordi han selv besidder den kvalitet han roser Bava så højt for, nemlig vilje og mod til at teste filmens materiale, for det er først og fremmest gennem billedet, at Freda forstår at træbinde sine tilskuere. Riccardo Freda har selv engang fortalt, at han er ked af, at filmens lærer partout skal være den samme rektangulære form gang efter gang, i film efter film. Selv så han helst, at

han kunne forme det efter indholdet, så han skiftevis kunne bruge horisontale og vertikale billeder alt efter hvad han skulle skildre¹, og det fortæller måske noget om i hvor høj grad Freda vil ofre sig for det gode billede.

tendens til at lave film på baggrund af litterære værker, ja visse blev endog for uhørte summer skrevet direkte til filmen af kendte forfattere. Dengang var det i et forsøg på at lave "kunstneriske film", men et litterært værk er jo ingen garanti for en litterær film.

kendte forfatter D'Annunzio, men set i forhold til samtidens produktioner, er det ikke ved sin handling, at **Cabiria** har noget videre at levere, og når den trak folk i biografen var det nok primært fordi den var en spektakulær mastodont af en film, hvor der ikke var sparet på hverken kulisser eller statister. Så selvom producenternes ambitioner lå et andet sted, så har Pastrone vist, at det ikke handlede så meget om indholdet, som det handlede om hvordan det blev leveret rent visuelt, og det er en tendens der er let at spore i både de tidlige peplums, såvel som i den anden peplumperiode, der spyttede muskelmænd ud fra de italienske filmstudier fra ca. midten af halvtredserne frem til midten af tresserne.

Cabiria var med sin fint polerede overflade og sit flotte fotografi med til at bane vejen for de senere peplumproduktioner såvel som det, der senere i USA skulle blive kendt som storfilm, det vil sige en afart af mainstreamfilmen, der genetablerer store klassiske miljøer med det formål, at forføre sine tilskuere. I **Cabirias** tilfælde blev tilskuerne præsenteret for filmhistoriens første egentlige *travelling shot*, der efter nutidens standarder er nærmest usynligt, men det er ikke for ingenting, at det var til **Cabiria**, at den slags blev opfundet, for hvis man konstant skal overbevise et hungrende publikum, må man for hver ny film være endnu mere opfindsom end forgængerne. Indholdet skulle selvfølgelig være der, men i peplumfilmen ofte kun for at etablere et miljø, som folk kunne nikke genkendende til, såsom det gamle Rom eller Israel.

Med stumfilmens endeligt i slutningen af 20'erne døde også den spektakulære peplum for en tid hen, og i Italien er den ikkeeksisterende under fascismen. Den dukker først op igen i de spæde halvtredserne, og nu var der helt andre tekniske midler, der kunne tages i brug. I europæisk henseende kan vi rent faktisk takke genopdagelsen af genren for at have været med til at bane vejen for den overmættede farvefotografi og ikke mindst for den fulde udnyttelse af bredformatet. Og blandt forgangsmændene for det, finder vi Riccardo Freda, der sammen med Vittorio Cottafavi siges at have fundet peplumfilmen.

Riccardo Freda blev født i 1909, og er derfor vokset op med stumfilmen. Selv fortæller han, at han blev opmærksom på, at filmen først og fremmest var et visuelt medie, da han i sin lokale biograf, *Silenzioso*, var så uheldig gang på gang at opleve, at den lokale pianist, til salens



Når vi i dag ser på, hvad biograferne byder på af science fiction og fantasy, for slet ikke at tale om de film, der spyttes ud fra Hongkong, er det tydeligt, at fortællinger, hvis de bare bliver fortalt flot nok, stadig kan få folk til forsvinde i læreredets dyb, forblændet af flotte skildringer af rendyrkede fantasier. Tidligere skulle der mindre til for at fascinere det hungrende mainstreampublikum, og paradoksalt nok, var det med kunstnerisk ambitioner, at mainstreamfilmen skulle indtræde i den form vi kender i dag. I 10'erne spreder der sig i så godt som hele Europa en

I Italien opstår peplum filmen som et led i en sådan bevægelse, og selvom den kunstneriske værdi med stor sandsynlighed også dengang kunne betvivles, så var investorerne villige til at smide flere penge på bordet end til den normale film. Og når pengene pludselig var der, kunne man tillade sig at bruge langt mere tid på at kæle for hvordan filmen kom til at se ud. Pastrones **Cabiria** fra 1914 er måske ikke den første italienske peplum, den ære tilfalder vist nok **Quo Vadis?** fra 1912, men den er nok uden tvivl den vigtigste. Manuskriptet blev skrevet af den

store morskab, spillede forkert. Billedet, siger han, blev for ham det, der skulle bære en følelse videre ii. Oprindelig var han uddannet skulptør, men han har altid brændt for filmen, og efter i et stykke tid at have været filmkritiker, begynder han at lave film.

På det tidspunkt han begynder, er Mussolini stadig ved magten, men i modsætning til lande som Tyskland, USA og Rusland, var italiensk film ikke decideret propagandistisk. Mussolini troede på filmen som et promoverende medie. Her havde han en chance for at vise verden, men også Italien selv, hvori deres folkeånd og glørværdige historie bestod, og til det var peplumfilmen jo et essentielt billede på Rom og romernes tidligere storhed. Til kunst-



nerisk at varetage sine tanker omkring filmen ansætter Mussolini den nok mere film- end politisk interesserede Luigi Freddi, og det er ham, der blev Fredas billet til den italienske filmindustri.

Inspireret af **Cabiria** og Guazzonis **Messaline** (aka **The Fall of an Empress**) fra 1926 beslutter Freda sig i 1952 for at sparke nyt liv i togerne, og forsøger sig med peplumfilmen. Med **Spartacus** stod det ikke galt til med ambitionerne, for det var meningen, at det skulle være en film om romernes grusomhed samt Spartacus' oprør, men pga. censuren måtte Freda skorte på sine ambitioner om at være historisk korrekt. Fra øverste instans så man det som forkasteligt at vise, at romerne på et tidspunkt i historien skulle have handlet forkert, og sådan som filmen kom til at tage sig ud kan man se venlige romere befri de stakkels slaver, men ikke, som tiltænkt, en scene, hvor en slave på kommando af romerne, bliver spist af en løve. Romerne var jo et menneskeligt folkefærd, det måtte Freda ikke glemme.

Men det var ikke kun i Italien, at man så filmen som et problem. I USA havde man, efter den kom frem, helt andre årsager til at ville stikke en kæp i hjulet på den. Her var man nemlig i gang med at lægge i ilden til Kubricks **Spartacus**, og da man så Fredas version som en direkte konkurrent, opkøbte man alle eksisterende versioner, originalnegativet og alt presse-materialet. Således kunne man sørge for at filmen blev glemt, og det var ikke før end en fransk versionering, der ser lidt anderledes ud med hensyn til de

censurerede scener, dukkede op, at man igen havde chance for at se den.

Sur over sit nederlag med **Spartacus** går Freda allerede året efter til den igen, denne gang med den stort anlagte **Teodora** (1953). Igen tager filmen udgangspunkt i en historisk begivenhed, og handler meget symbolisk om slavepigen Teodora, der rejser sig i oprør mod de riges rettigheder. Freda morer sig i dag meget over, at det lykkedes ham at få den handling igennem, for hvad man dengang overså var, at Byzans i det 6. århundrede, hvor filmen foregår, var under romersk styre, hvorfor filmen i realiteten bliver den film om slavernes oprør mod det romerske styre, som han med **Spartacus** ikke fik lov til at lave.

Men også på et andet punkt går det med **Teodora** bedre for Freda. Allerede under de indledende faser får Freda nemlig at vide, at i USA var MGM i gang med at lave deres version af **Teodora** med Ava Gardner i hovedrollen. Freda sværger, at hans film skal nå ud i alverdens biografer før den amerikanske, og han udvikler således her den, måske i visse øjne noget tvivlsomme, kvalitet, der gør, at han senere blev den person man hyrede, hvis en film havde overskredet budgettet eller tidsplanen. Han arbejder nemlig både hurtigt og billigt uden at det nødvendigvis går ud over kvaliteten. For ham handler det mere om at vide på forhånd, hvor kameraerne skal stå, og hvad de skal optage, noget der ikke lyder af meget, men noget de samtidige amerikanske produktioner er kendt for ikke at have styr på. Derfor har Freda heller ikke meget til overs for de amerikanske instruktører, der i årene efter strømmede til Italien for at benytte sig af deres erfaringer og billige produktionsmuligheder. Freda fortæller ofte om, hvor mange gange han har set folk som eks. Andre de Toth gå fuldstændig i spåner, hvis de af en eller anden årsag ikke kunne følge det givne storyboard. For Freda havde de ingen idé om, hvad film gik ud på, fordi de ikke besad den tekniske kunnen til at gå ind og improvisere på stedet, og når man læser interviews med folk, der har arbejdet med ham, hører man ofte, at Freda kunne finde på at fyre sine kameramænd, hvis de ikke kunne levere det han ville have, for selv at kunne søge tilflugt bag kameraet. Rent faktisk er Mario Bava den eneste instruktør Freda udtaler sig positivt om, og ikke uden grund, for nogle af hans flotteste film, har han lavet i samarbejde med Mario Bava.

Teodora vandt hurtig stor udbredelse i verden, også i Danmark, hvor den efter sigende skulle have været en stor succes. Når man i dag ser filmen som den italofile Martin Scorsese kalder en af sine yndlingsfilm, er der heller ingen tvivl om, at Freda, på trods af den noget spegede handling, har forstået at lave et værk, der i ren visuel elegance stadig holder, men når den havde den store succes den havde, er det jo nok også fordi, det er Fredas første forsøg med farvefilm, og derfor en af de første peplums i farver.

Der skal efter **Teodora** gå nogle år inden Freda igen kommer til at lægge navn til en peplum, og i den mellemliggende periode arbejder

han med flere projekter, hvoraf de fleste går i vasken. Perioden op til 1960, hvor han laver **I giganti della Tessaglia** er også perioden, hvor peplumfilmen for alvor begynder at bryde igennem i de store biografer, og hvor amerikanerne for alvor benytter sig af Cinecittas studier til indspilning af storfilm. I perioden tjener Freda primært sine penge som håndværker, i det han ofte blive ind-



kaldt som redningsmand for kuldsejlede projekter. Et sådant projekt er **Nel segno di Roma** (1958), der oprindeligt var krediteret til Guido Brigone, en af Italiens helt store mainstreaminstruktører, men fakta var, at han få dage inde i filmen blev syg. Freda fortæller, at for at co-instruere fik producenten således fat i filmens Nord- og Sydpol: Antonioni og Freda iii. Hvor Antonioni tog sig af skuespillet og interiørscenerne, tog Freda sig af eksteriørscener, kampe, forfølgelser mm.

At en instruktør som Antonioni ikke var videre stolt over at have



arbejdet på en peplum kan man vel ikke betvivle, og Freda påpeger, at det at bede Antonioni om at lave en peplum er som at bede Beelzebub komme og fejre søndagsmesse med Paven iv.

Freda derimod er glad for peplumfilmen som en genre, der giver ham mulighed for at arbejde med filmens potentiale for at forføre publikum.

Han går endda så langt som til at sige om sig selv, at han er den eneste italienske instruktør, der kunne lide at lave peplumfilm. For andre var det bare et spørgsmål om, at man for at tjene penge lavede film indenfor den genre, der nu engang var oppe i tiden. Og det er jo som bekendt et stort fænomen i Italien, at markedet, når en film først er blevet en succes, bliver oversvømmet med film, der skal forsøge at ride med på bølgen. Og det er derfor heller ikke noget tilfælde, at de fleste italienske b-filminstruktører har lavet film i så godt som alle de dominerende hovedgenrer.

Men hvor Freda altså er stolt over at have været med til at lancere ikke blot horrorfilmen i Italien, men også til at genlancere peplumfilmen, forholder han sig anderledes til de film han selv har lavet for at ride med på andres succeser. Derfor er det ikke hans agentfilm **Coplan FX 18 casse tout** (1965) eller hans forsøg udi gialloen **L'Osessione che uccide** (1980) han, når han bliver spurgt, er mest stolt over. Selv siger han, at disse to, og mange andre, er film, der skulle tjene til, at han kunne få mad på bordet.

Og måske er det derfor, at der ikke er så langt mellem Fredas peplums og hans horrorfilm, for i begge tilfælde kan man mærke, at han er interesseret i at se hvor langt han kan drive den rent visuelle iscenesættelse. Når man ser på hans to Maciste-film, som han laver i 1961 og 1962, altså i samme periode hvor han laver sine to Hitchcock-film **Lo Spettro** (1963) og **L'Orribile segreto del dottor Hitchcock** (1962) kan man se, at Freda nyder godt af sine år som håndværker på andres film. Her har han fundet ud af, i hvor høj grad man kan nedtone fortællingen ved at lade store dele af handlingen være op til tilskuernes digte videre på. I hans horrorfilm er det sjældent, at det grusomme bliver andet end antydning, og selvom det ville være en fejl at sige, at de store barmavede muskelmænd kun blev antydning i filmene **Maciste all'Inferno** (1962) og **Maciste alla corte del Gran Khan** (1961), så er de begge svendestykker udi hvor langt man kan drive Macistes rejser til fjerne regioner og fantasilandskaber uden egentlig at vise særlig meget. Af samme grund synes jeg derfor, at det, af de af Fredas peplumfilm jeg har set, er de to Maciste-film, der vinder i det lange løb.

Når man ser hans øvrige peplumfilm er der ingen tvivl om, at de er lavet af en mand, der hele sin barndom har været opslugt af film såvel som af den klassiske litteraturs hovedværker. For de ville ikke kunne være lavet uden et enormt kendskab til den klassiske mytologi, til oldtidens historie og ikke mindst til de klassiske heltefortællinger. Men selv om han har mere sig med at iscenesætte Homer, Tolstoj, Shakespeare og Dumas, kommer man ikke helt udenom, at disse film har det problem, at litteratur først og fremmest lever på skrift. Derfor er Freda også mindre god, når han giver sig i kast med eks. Homer, end når han kaster sig over Maciste, der i realiteten er en meget sjov karakter. I modsætning til sag-nospundne personer som eks. Herkules og Samson, er Maciste helt og aldeles et produkt af filmen. Han

blev opfundet af D'Annunzio til **Cabiria**, og selvom han her kun gør en kort optræden, har han herefter optrådt i så mange film, at Maciste-filmen næsten må siges at være en undergenre til peplumfilmen.

Det morsomme ved Maciste er, at han er en undskyldning. Han er en undskyldning, ikke så meget for at kunne fortælle en historie, men for at få lov til at lave en film. Og selvom han blev skrevet med de store litterære armbevægelser, får han hurtigt sit eget liv, der kort og godt består i, at han som en anden superhelt er præcis der, hvor der er brug for ham. I sin levetid har han således også optrådt i så godt som alle perioder, fra oldtiden frem til den 20. århundrede, og han har kæmpet mod alt fra onde, magtmisbrugende tyranner til vampyrer.

Begge Fredas Maciste-film foregår således i miljøer man ikke ligefrem forbinder med peplumfilm. **Maciste alla corte del Gran Khan** starter i det fjerne østen, hvor ondsindede mongoler har taget styret, og i **Maciste all'Inferno** bliver vi først præsenteret for en forhistorie, der udspiller sig i 1500-tallet, hvor en heks i en lille skotsk landsby, der inden hun bliver brændt på bålet, kaster en forbandelse over byen. Hundrede år efter kommer et nygift par til byen, og da konen tilfældigvis deler navn med den afdøde heks, har hun selvfølgelig straks en proces på nakken.

Det sjove ved Maciste-filmene er, at de i realiteten har mere at gøre med superheltefilm end noget andet. Han ingen speciel tilknytning til noget miljø, men rejser frit i dem alle. Han er inkarnationen af det

gode, der kæmper mod det onde, og selvom han ikke altid kommer med det samme, en orden er blevet forstyrret - i **Maciste alla corte del Gran Khan** når mongolerne immer-væk at dominere i 10 år, før Maciste finder det belejligt at hoppe frem fra sin busk - kæmper han sig altid stødt og roligt gennem den ene forhindring efter den anden, indtil det gode igen har fået overtaget. Og så er han klar til nye eventyr i andre film.

Og selvom den meget arketypiske skildring af forholdet mellem det gode og det onde godt kan skære en i øjnene, kan man ikke komme udenom, at Maciste er en af filmens eneste mytologiske figurer - der er ingen litterære forskrifter, der skal overholdes, og netop pga. den grove definition - en mand, der som beskytter af de gode, kæmper mod det ultimativt onde - kan han optræde overalt. Der lægges derfor heller ikke i Maciste-filmene skul på, at de er undskyldninger for at underholde. Det vigtigste er derfor ikke at lave en film om Maciste, men at placere ham i et tilpas spektakulært landskab, og lade ham kæmpe tilpas spektakulære kampe.

Personligt synes jeg det kunne være spændende at se, hvor langt Freda kunne have bedrevet det, hvis han havde overført de politiske ambitioner fra de tidligere film over i hans Maciste-film, men i den mellemliggende periode er tiden jo blevet en anden, og den italienske filmindustri er ikke længere underlagt en streng selvrens, hvorfor der egentlig heller ikke var det store at omgå. Så selvom Fredas sene peplumfilm er flotte, og kvalitetsmæssigt godt skruet sammen, mangler man lidt den politiske nerve eller i hvert fald

en nuancering af den meget naive opridsning mellem godt og ondt.

Af de to Maciste-film må jeg indrømme, at **Maciste all'Inferno** stadig er den bedste. Blandingen af peplum og gotisk horror fungerer teknisk set ret godt, og jeg har det i realiteten bedre med, at Maciste skal kæmpe med mytologiske skikkelser end mod almindelige mennesker - det er simpelthen mere spændende at se på. Det holder også det spektakulære i hævd, at han render rundt i en version af Helvede, der er en tilpas blanding Dante og Homer og Vergil. Det er også morsomt at se, at Maciste har fået et hukommelsestab skrevet ind i filmen af den ene grund, at producenterne herved får mulighed for at trække tråden tilbage til tidligere Maciste-film: i et flashback ser vi således klip fra tre tidligere Maciste-film (**Maciste nella terre dei ciclopi**; **Maciste alla corte del Gran Khan** og **Maciste nella valle dei re**), hvor man, for at sikre kontinuiteten, klippet Kirk Morris' hoved ind på skuldrene af de tidligere Maciste-skuespillere. Et godt forsøg på at skabe kontinuitet i Maciste-mytologien, men ikke noget Freda selv har været med til. I Italien, som i USA, blev mainstreamfilmene nemlig overvåget af producenterne, der købte manuskripter et sted, hyrede en instruktør et andet, og fik filmene klippet (ofte i flere forskellige versioner) et tredje.

Freda er ikke selv ked af, at hans film ofte bliver klippet uden hans indvirkning, for han ser instruktørtjansen som en mulighed for at koncentrere sig om det, han interesserer sig mest for, nemlig det at komponere

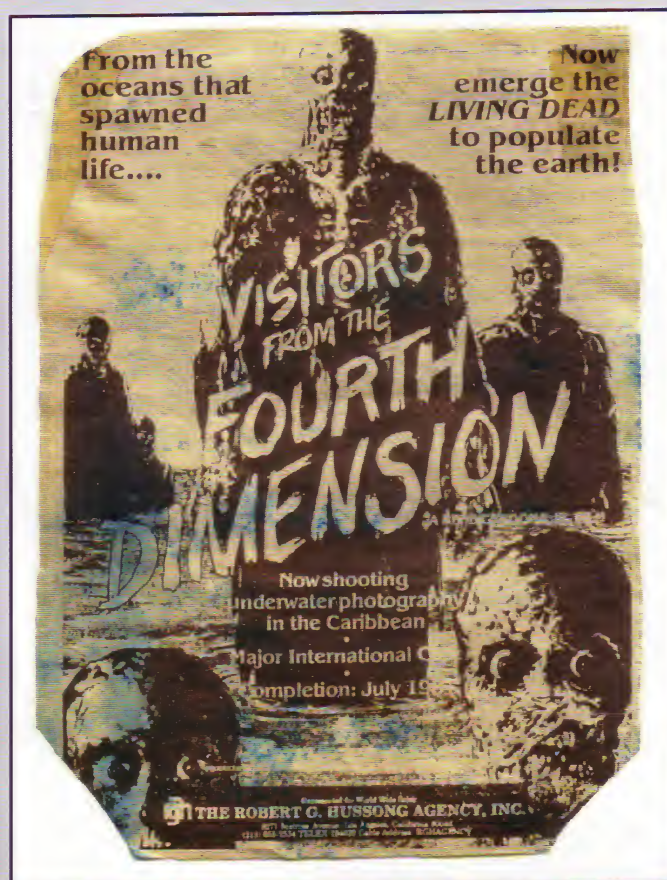
og opbygge billeder; og det er et gennemgående træk i Fredas film, at han har forsøgt at få så meget ud af billederne som overhovedet muligt, for han var klar over, at klipning og lyd ofte blev overtaget af andre. Men det sagt, så er Freda også en pragmatiker, så skulle man afslutningsvis ønske lidt mere af hans film, så var det lidt nerve, for i bund og grund vil han ikke det store med det han laver.

- i Citeret efter samtaler med Riccardo Freda, der er udgivet i bogen **Un pirate à la caméra - entretiens avec Riccardo Freda**. Redigeret af Eric Poindron, Institut Lumière / Actes Sud, Paris, 1995. p.226.
- ii Ibid. p.39
- iii Ibid. p.266
- iv Ibid. p.267

Thure er anmelder på det danske website for kultfilm, www.uncut.dk. Afgjort et besøg værd. -Ed.

Redaktøren efterlyser! Sidste jul ryddede jeg lidt op i mine forældres loftsrum og fandt nogle gamle bøger og skolepapirer i temmelig sørgelig tilstand. Mus havde gnavet, fugten udvisket skriften i for længst glemte stilehæfter, ekskursionsrapporter og karakterbøger; en stærk, ubehagelig jordslået, rådden lugt hang ved de fugtige papirer. Jeg slæbte det hele ned i en papkasse som nærmest faldt fra hinanden undervejs og pillede nænsomt enkelte bevaringsværdige genstande ud af bunken i det jeg følte mig lidt ligesom P. V. Glob dengang han udgravede Grauballe-manden og de andre moselig fra tørv.

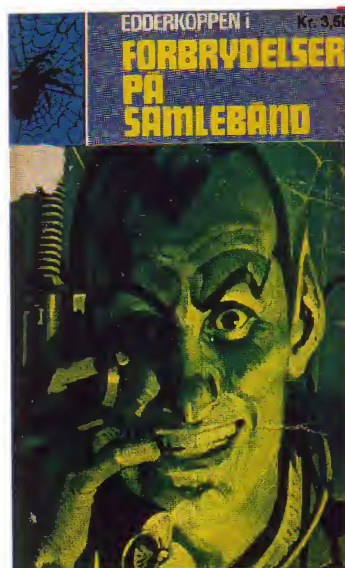
Fragmenterne var kuriøse: Et udklip fra Aktuelt 11.april 1981 med overskriften "Chokket rammer verden igen", om attentatet på daværende USA præsident Ronald Reagan - man kunne læse, at den sovjetiske præsident, Leonid Bresjnev, sendte et personligt telegram, hvori lederen af ondskabens imperium gav... *udtryk for sin dybe indignation overfor mordforsøget, som han betegnede som en kriminel handling*. Her var en gammel notesbog, ubenyttet bortset fra den sidste side, hvor jeg havde nedskriblet sætlisten for DEEP PURPLES koncert i Malmø Isstadion 25.februar 1987. Koncerten varede fra kl.21 til 22.30 og som ekstranummer spillede bandet "Black Night". Længere nede i bunken en håndfuld indgangsbilletter til museer m.v. fra min gymnasierejse til Rom i 1986. Og meget mere. Den mest obskuriøse effekt var en dagbladsannonce for en kommende horrorfilm, gengivet heroverfor. Det kunne nok ligne en gang italiensk zombie-slask a la Fulci, men i givet fald hvilken? Jeg husker ikke længere hvad der fik mig til at klippe annoncen ud og tilsyneladende eksisterer filmen slet ikke, den kan i hvert tilfælde ikke spores over Internettet. Kære læser, sidder du med oplysninger om **Visitors from the Fourth Dimension**, så tøv ikke med at skrive eller maile ind til redaktionen!





BAGTALEN V/REDAKTØREN

Fællesstanden **Obskuriøst/Stay Sick!** på Copenhagen Film Fair i Nørrebrohallen 3. februar 2002 var et af de mest dødfødte projekter siden Robert Scott i 1911 besluttede sig for at nå Sydpolen pr. pony. Min kollega Jack Jensen og jeg kom ud med store forventninger til messen hvis tema var horror film og gik nærmest grædende derfra; så få blade blev der solgt. Den danske provinsielle attitude overfor film – en kulturform vi aldrig har lært at tage seriøst – slog til igen: Dagens hovedtaler var Trine Dyrholm og hun så da moderat smålækker ud i sin stramme sorte bluse, men hvad havde det at gøre med horror? Entré prisen på 50 kr. må betegnes som pebret for et arrangement der mest af alt smagte af "søndag eftermiddag kræmmermarked for familien Danmark".



Redaktionen har modtaget nogle tyggegummi-mærker til gennemsyn fra Bo Valeur i Lyngby. Det drejer sig om tre samlerserier fra 1960'erne med Batman-motiver i form af filmstils og tegninger. Vi var blevet stillet i udsigt, at det ikke var billeder fra den campede amerikanske tv-serie med Adam West & Burt Ward og forventede derfor nogle virkelige obskuriøse sager – f.eks. en hidtil upåagtet brasiliansk eller rumænsk kopiserie fra samme periode. Stor skuffelse, da det alligevel viste sig at være den amerikanske. I kuverten lå også et tegneseriehæfte om 'Edderkoppen', dvs. ikke den rigtige Edderkoppen, men en temmelig skummel superagent med dæknavnet 'The Spider', som er grøn i hovedet og faktisk lidt ligner 'Den grønne gnom', så måske er der en slags forbindelse alligevel. Redaktionen ser med interesse frem til flere fantasifulde bidrag fra hr. Valeur (efterhånden som han får dem tegnet færdig).



Udgivere af idealistiske skrifter ejer sjældent salt til et æg. Jack Jensen trygler således i kolofonen til **Stay Sick!** #3 folk om at sende ham "gratis penge eller poser med guf". En kvindelig læser fik medlidenhed med Jack og sendte en større Røde Kors-pakke, men havde gjort regning uden det lokale postvæsen som 'bortkom' pakken. Det er hårde tider for det skrivende folk – selv led jeg for nylig den tort at få fra-stjålet mine ærligt tjente bibliotekspenge af selveste kulturafviklingsminister Brian Mikkelsen. Og alligevel bliver vi ved, uforberdelige som vi er.



Egentlig skulle jeg have rapporteret om og fra optagelserne til **Råden kærlighed**, en amatør-horrorfilm med bl.a. Heine Sørensen og Jack Jensen på rollelisten. (Det forlyder, at Jack var yderst overbevisende som sulten zombie. Men det tror da pokker, når han til daglig må tigge sine læsere om mad.) Optagelserne er i skrivende stund nærværd afsluttede, men om der nogensinde kommer et færdigt produkt ud af anstrengelserne er mere tvivlsomt. Jeg var blevet lovet en statistrolle som zombie i den store slutscene, hvor de døde står op af graven og giver sig til at gnaske i helt & heltinde, men kommunikationen med filmens bagmænd fungerede dårligt og da jeg endelig tog ud til optagelserne blev jeg simpelthen glemt af de som skulle have hentet mig på Valby Station. Efterfølgende modtog jeg en vattet undskyldning om at min kontaktpersons mobilbatteri var løbet tør (?) og fik lovning på en mindre dialog scene som kompensation. Da denne også løb ud i sandet mistede jeg ligesom interessen for projektet. Ud over den personlige skuffelse ærgrer det mig selvfølgelig at læserne nu går glip af en historie fra dansk filmundergrund. Æv.

OBSKURIØST er et lille blad. Så lille, at redaktøren er nødt til selv at gå i biografen for at orientere sig om aktuelle film. Egentlig dækker vi ikke de store biografpublikumstræffere, den opgave overlader vi trygt til dagbladenes luderjournalistiske weekendtillæg, men Tolkien har haft en stor plads i mit hjerte, siden jeg i ottende klasse kastede mig over "De to tårne" (fordi "Eventyret om ringen" var udlånt fra skolebiblioteket) og dér opdagede et fantastisk univers. Fik jeg så spoleret min 'barnetro' af Peter Jacksons **Ringenes Herre**? Næ, filmen var god og så loyal overfor forlægget som en film velsagtens kan tillade sig at være her i det ny årtusinde. Efter min mening dog ikke loyal nok – Liv Taylors scener f.eks. var og blev kunstige. Men især Ian McKellen og Ian Holm leverede klassiske præstationer, som hhv. Gandalf og Bilbo. Og Christopher Lee, selvfølgelig, nær de 80 år er han stadig i fin form, rank, høj og ærværdigt smuk i sit hvide kostume. En fornøjelse at opleve mesteren i endnu en autoritativ skurkerrolle. At en anmelder på Berlingske Tidende, Jakob Levinsen, forinden på tåbeligste facon og akkompagneret af småfnisen fra det øvrige debatpanel, inklusive studieværten havde nedgjort Lee for åben skærm i DR TV programmet **Bogart** (10.12.01) siger til gengæld en del om hvor ringe det egentlig står til herhjemme med at anerkende den fantastiske genre: *Den mest markante svaghed for mig at se... det er simpelthen at Christopher Lee i mine øjne slet ikke er en skuespiller på niveau med Ian McKellen eller snart sagt nogle af de andre i hovedrollerne. Hans karriere har været bygget på at være tårnhøj og se ond ud og der skal en del mere til.* Programmet nåede det absolutte lavpunkt for anstændighed, da et vittigt hoved blandt debatdeltagerne indskød, at Lee dog var gift med en dansker.

